CONNECT!ONS Med!aLit moments

| Consortium for Media Literacy | Volume No. 66 | November 2014 |

In This Issue…

Theme: Participation in What?

This issue of *Connections* presents Part 2 of the blog discussion between Tessa Jolls (CML) and Henry Jenkins (USC Annenberg Innovation Lab) as they encourage collaboration between the Media Literacy and Digital Media & Learning (DML) communities. Last month's debate focused on *What's in a name?* Now, the discussion turns to preparing students for a participatory culture, but what does that mean? This issue tackles *Participation in What?*

Henry Jenkins is Provost's Professor of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California. He arrived at USC in Fall 2009 after spending the past decade as the Director of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Program and the Peter de Florez Professor of Humanities. He is the author and/or editor of twelve books on various aspects of media and popular culture.

In 2006 Jenkins published a white paper, *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century (sponsored by MacArthur Foundation),* which was, and still is, a profound and significant examination of the new media emerging from the technology advances of our time, and a document that contributed great advances to understanding media literacy skills needed in our society.

In exploring the relationship between new media and media literacy education, Jenkins and Jolls are heeding the call from Canadian pioneer Barry Duncan, who called for action in his 2010 Voices of Media Literacy interview:

"You get all of these competing literacies, and that is not a bad thing...but there needs to be a way to bridge these and that has not successfully happened. Critical pedagogy has a lot to offer…I want to see (it) having a major role in bringing the key ideas both of traditional media and new media -- of bringing them together and making all of these things as meaningful in the curriculum. The so-called convergence and the culture of connectivity -- all of the new directions -- all of that has to be reconciled with the traditional. And if we do a good job at that we will be successful."

Participation in What? Part 2 of Jenkins and Jolls
This material was also published on Henry Jenkins' weblog – [Confessions of an Aca-Fan](#)

Henry: …I have called for a recognition that media literacy is a "social skill" having to do with the ways we interface with each other, how we participate collectively within the activities of a networked society. I fear that our schools place too much emphasis on the autonomous learner and not enough emphasis on how we create and share knowledge together. This is perhaps a key way in which the new media literacies differ -- we are focusing on notions of collectivity and connectivity more. Our emphasis on participation begs the question, *participation in what*. I've made this a key concern in some of my own recent writings, but the answer necessarily involves something larger than the individual, or it is by nature not participation.

Tessa: I appreciate your exploring the question of "participation in what?" Maybe there are no set answers to this question — maybe our role in media literacy education is to help increase the *capacity* of participants to participate effectively in whatever *they* choose to engage with?

I certainly agree with you that media literacy is a social skill in regards to how we relate to each other and how we participate collectively within the activities of a networked society. Relationships are — and have always been — central to media literacy and media literacy education. First and foremost, through media literacy we explore our relationship with media itself. We engage with media and given its pervasiveness in our lives, divorce is not an option!

In understanding our media relationship, we come to see that there are relationships between the text, the audience and the producers/participants, and as technology has offered increased capacity for interaction and world-wide connectivity, that relationship becomes more and more dynamic and expansive. At the same time, our media relationship affects our very identities as individuals and as affiliative groups — we have private selves (what goes on inside), public/representational selves (how we extend and represent ourselves to others alone or as a group/entity) and what I call "commercialized" selves (that allow marketing and/or ideological elements, such as branding or big data, define who we are or whom we affiliate with and whom we are seen to affiliate with).   These notions apply to individuals as well as organizations or groups.

I agree with you, that schools emphasize individual autonomy and not enough emphasis on how we create and share knowledge together. (And I believe that higher education is the tail that wags the Pre-K-12 dog in this regard — SAT scores and college admissions departments reward individuals). But sharing is not a new idea — sharing has been part of enlightened media literacy pedagogies for many years. I quote Masterman's 18 Basic Principles again because — well, he is my master (and I am continually wowed to see how his words resonate through the years): "Media Education is essentially active and participatory, fostering the development of more open and democratic pedagogies. It encourages students to take more

responsibility for and control over their own learning…"

As technology has enabled the classroom walls to break down through more connectivity, good media literacy pedagogy becomes more and more feasible — and desirable — in both formal and informal settings. "Underlying Media Education is a distinctive epistemology," Masterman wrote. "Existing knowledge is not simply transmitted by teachers or 'discovered' by students. It is not an end but a beginning. It is the subject of critical investigations and dialogue out of which new knowledge is actively created by student and teachers." This dialogue arises in many contexts, not just the formal classroom. And as you said (and it can't be said enough!), we have a moral and economic challenge in our society to insure that these opportunities are widely and equitably available.

Because of the lack of education system imperatives to teach media literacy and to encourage critical autonomy alone and through groups -- rather than to meet fill-in-the-bubble testing deadlines — it is difficult at best to deliver media education in a credible and evidence-based way. Often, media researchers have no clue about what pedagogy is or how school systems work — and it is for this reason that we often say that media literacy is more about education than about media. The education imperative is paramount: the promise of the technology in putting power into the hands of the people is squandered if people don't have the critical thinking skills *and* complementary new media skills to use technology wisely and to amplify benefits from its use.

But then the questions become, what skills are necessary and how do we help people gain media literacy skills? Your 2006 white paper outlined new media skills that are needed — play, performance, simulation, appropriation, multitasking, distributed cognition, collective intelligence, judgment, transmedia navigation, networking and negotiation. These are sophisticated skills that are highly suited to the technology and the digital world that enables their use. They rest on the basic foundations of media literacy skills that are usually missing for students, or that are taken for granted by media researchers who may already have a conceptual understanding of media representations, deconstruction and construction. However — and yes I repeat myself — this basic foundation is absent in American education systems. Quite simply, teachers cannot teach what they do not know and what the system has not valued.

And so we — as educators and as citizens — have skipped teaching and learning an enormous media literacy underpinning for new media as well as for non-digital media like the logos on shirts, the billboards, the theater plays, the food packaging, the school posters. And this lack of understanding of basic media literacy concepts translates from the playground to the Twitter feed. And as you said, Henry, it also robs researchers of a rich base of knowledge that should inform their work. Yet it's important to have unity as a field so that we can gain traction and scale our work in a significant way amongst the general population — to translate the Research & Development (R&D) into awareness and actions of use to citizens nationally

and globally.

This translation goal has been the Center for Media Literacy's (CML's) mission since its founding by Elizabeth Thoman in Los Angeles in 1989 (and with CML's predecessor organization the Center for Media&Values springing from Thoman's work beginning as a USC Annenberg graduate student in the late 1970s). I applaud your work and that of others, to operationalize and to "package" these powerful media literacy ideas and practices into pedagogy and curricula available for all of our citizens and youth — so needed! We must always keep in mind that we are trying to reach and inspire *millions* of people and so our task is enormous — but other movements, such as the environmental movement, provide us with inspiration and hope for fulfilling our mission.

In the meanwhile, we have a foundation to lay, with an expanded repertoire of media literacy skills that are needed in the 21st century (thanks to your groundbreaking work). *What are the media literacy fundamentals that have been so neglected these past decades?*

Earlier I noted that Masterman focused on priorities for media literacy education by saying: "Media are symbolic sign systems that must be decoded (and encoded)… The central unifying concept of media literacy is that of representation (what is represented through media to us, and what we represent to others through media)."

He went on to say, "Without this principle, no media education is possible. From it, all else flows." This idea is as relevant to today's media as it was to the media of Masterman's time.

Henry: I really appreciate the work the CML does in translating research into awareness and action, in trying to build a more sustainable and scalable movement for media literacy. As someone who sees themselves first and foremost as a researcher, I am deeply committed to translating our research into language that can be broadly accessible and providing resources which can be deployed within important conversations; I see this blog as part of the work I try to do to broker between different groups of people who should be talking to each other. My team through the years has done a fair amount of applied work with educators, trying to get our materials out in the field. We've come to the same conclusion you have that media literacy is at least as much about rethinking education as it is about rethinking media. We found very early on that developing resources were never enough unless you also helped to train the teachers who would be using those materials. This took us down the path of developing and running teacher training programs in New Hampshire and California, and then publishing a series of white papers which dealt with what we saw as best practices in fostering participatory learning, practices that both dealt with how to integrate the new media literacies into school curriculum but also how to couple them with progressive pedagogies that are very much in line with those that Masterman describes above -- pedagogies that are very much informed by thinkers such as Dewey and Freire. See, for example:

http://henryjenkins.org/2012/12/play-participatory-learning-and-you.html
http://henryjenkins.org/2012/12/shall-we-play.html
http://henryjenkins.org/2012/09/designing-with-teachers-participatory-approaches-to-professional-development-in-education.html

We are back in the trenches again with the latest phase of our work, this time emerging from extensive research (interviews with more than 200 young activists) about the political and civic lives of American youth: We've now built an archive featuring videos produced by young activists around a range of causes, many of them appropriating and remixing elements from popular culture, many of them using tools and tactics associated with participatory culture. This time, we are testing these materials in collaboration with the National Writing Project, and working with their teachers (as well as the organizations we study) to develop activities and lesson plans which might allow educators to integrate our materials and insights into their teaching. One thing we've learned through the years is that our core strength is ultimately in cultural theory and research and thanks to my move to USC, coupled with media production capacities; we have some understanding of core pedagogical issues; but we do better working hand in hand with classroom teachers to develop the actual activities that make sense in the public schools. And we count on the power of various networks -- including both the Media Literacy Movement and those folks involved with the DML world -- to get word out about what we've created. This is why I place such a high priority in building partnerships which can help us work together to achieve our shared goals.

The issue of whether representation remains the core of contemporary media literacy is a complex one, it seems to me. Representation is a powerful principle, one which helps to explain the ways we use media to make sense of ourselves and our lives, and it remains very pertinent in a world where we are encouraging young people to develop a stronger sense of their own public voices, to tell their own stories, to create their own media. Looking critically at existing representations, thinking ethically about the choices they make as they create their own representations as media producers remain core to any understanding of media literacy, but young people are also participating in media which are more focused on social exchanges and personal interactions in which the creation of texts is secondary to the cementing of social bonds. If we were developing media literacy in response to the telephone rather than television, would we be asking different questions, have different priorities?

Representation is itself a process, to be sure, but we also often use it to refer to a product or text: a representation. The disciplines which do much of the heavy lifting on media literacy education -- especially language arts but also arts education -- tend to focus heavily on texts, and so as the term representation gets translated into their vocabulary, it is not surprising that it comes to circle around texts. This focus on texts can lead us to think in terms of readers and writers/producers but not in terms of participants in an ongoing communication process. And this is a key reason why my vocabulary tends to place a greater emphasis on notions of participation than on notions of representation.

Tessa: Ah...and so down the rabbit hole we go. And we are going on a slippery slope because as you said, it's complicated. I'm enjoying the ride!
Which universe are we describing? The physical world that surrounds us and that we perceive on a local and physical level -- the world that surrounds us with physical media like logos and traffic signs and billboards and movies and music and candy wrappers -- or the alternative global village or digital media that we access only through the assistance of hardware and software media like the internet in general or Instagram or Facebook or games? In each case, the media are man-made, which means that men (and oh yes let's be sure to be inclusive and say women too) construct these media messages and devices. Construction always calls for decisions on the part of the creator(s), who sets the initial limits and boundaries through which we may experience his or her creation -- *media construction, whether digital or not, is a physical representation of the creator's intention.*

So fundamentally, construction and (implicitly) representation must take place before participation is possible. And participatory culture (whether we participate online or off) is both an input to and an outcome of construction/representation -- and the fusion constantly changes the nature of and the expression of the construction, which always has emotional, social and cultural implications. There is a chicken-or-egg quality to the cultural issues and their intersection with media, but it can also be argued that an individual's mind and group culture itself are also constructions/representations.

But back to media...As an example, let's think about video games. The games are media constructions and they provide a software "box" in which players operate, and this software box is constrained by the hardware platform. The creator of the game designed the game intentionally -- to share a worldview and/or to profit from game purchases. Players engage with the game text itself and interact with each other to experience the game in a myriad of ways -- visual, verbal, social, emotional -- and often players invent new ways of experiencing the game through mods or hardware and they amplify their experiences together. But because the construction itself is constrained, there are inevitably frames and experiences that are included and excluded.

So much depends on how we parse the world we live in! But at the same time, to take a scientific approach towards media literacy, we need boundaries and concepts that define and describe a specific field of inquiry -- that of media, in this case. While the cementing of social bonds through media use may be a primary goal for youth or adults, media are still the means toward an end, while also acknowledging that digital spaces (constructions) multiply possibilities for and the nature of social engagement exponentially.

I agree with you, Henry, that the focus on the word " texts" -- because of its traditional association with physical media -- generally limits people's perceptions about participating in an ongoing communication process that digital media enable. In today's context in the global village, the notion of text expands so that "text" may become the entire "box" that encompasses

the digital world itself, and the cultural representations within the box and outside it. We now have the physical world and the digital world and their intertwining and as Steve Jobs famously espoused, we need to "think different."

Nevertheless, to be a field, media literacy must have a set of "universals" that always apply -- timeless concepts that describe how media operate as a symbolic system. These concepts must apply to the physical and digital world, and they must traverse both, without exception. The concepts, like the laws of physics, must serve as the basis for theory and pedagogy (practice) and implementation because otherwise, we have no commonality or foundation to build upon. We need such a conceptual foundation to be able to replicate, measure and scale applications.

The Five Core Concepts of media literacy offer such a foundation, and with an expanded notion of "text" or "message" in mind, and with the idea that constructions are implicitly representations, here they are:

CML's Five Core Concepts
1. All media messages are constructed.
2. Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power. (For those uncomfortable with the word 'power,' CML intends its use in the broadest sense)

There are various expressions of these concepts – for example, Canadians use eight Key Concepts, but CML compressed them to five for the U.S. beginning in the early 1990s. The Five Core Concepts are rooted in Masterman's work and developed by Canadian media literacy pioneers including Barry Duncan and John Puengente in the 1980s.

These Five Concepts are as relevant to new media as to any other media. There is a distinction here between describing how media operate as a symbolic system — the theoretical description of media embodied in the Five Core Concepts — and how individuals and groups use and experience the media — the practice, the skills, the applications of the theory.

As researchers and developers in the field, we must constantly test the Core Concepts to see whether they are still universally valid and descriptive of all forms of media. It is this basic description of a global media system at work that distinguishes media literacy from other communications fields, and they provide a rallying point around which institutionalizing media literacy becomes possible. The Core Concepts capture the fundamental understanding that has long been missing in our culture and in the Pre-K- 23 +++ education system. They also

provide the basis for pedagogy that can be built around them.

Henry, in the name of all those who have come before us, I am deeply grateful and privileged to have this opportunity to explore and share with you and I hope, to help build these bridges that are so needed. Do I believe that our R&D should continue to advance the field of media literacy and media literacy education? Absolutely! And I also believe that the Core Concepts, rooted in the big idea of representation, offer a major foundational bridge that is applicable anytime, anywhere, in any media, with any "text," and that all citizens need access to a common understanding of media that the Core Concepts provide.

CML News

The Council on Injury, Violence and Poison Prevention sponsored a panel in which Tessa Jolls, CML Director, participated at the American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition, held Oct. 11-14 in San Diego. The panel, also composed of Donald Shifrin, MD, FAAP, of Pediatric Associates in Bellevue, WA, and Col. Jeffrey Hutchinson, MD, FAAP, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, MD, was organized and moderated by Benjamin Hoffman, MD, FAAP, Oregon Health Sciences University Doernbecher Children's Hospital, Portland, OR, and addressed the topic: "We Are What We See: Violence in the Media, and What We Can Do About It." Jolls shared results of CML's longitudinal study, conducted by UCLA, evaluating its _Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media_ curriculum.

The Association for Media Literacy (AML) conference _Understanding Media Now_ was held October 18, 2014 in Toronto. One of the featured panels organized by Dr. Belinha de Abreau of Fairfield University, "Big Data – Information Privacy in a Media Saturated World," discussed how big data changes the media relationships of the individual, citizenry, and society. Panelists provided perspectives from K-12, cable, telecommunications, broadcasting, and the Internet, as well as a look at civic media in regard to participatory engagement and mobilization.

Other panel members included: Kat Stewart, Cable Impact Foundation, Dr. Paul Mihailidis, Emerson College, and Tessa Jolls, CML.

About Us...

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communications that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth. **http://consortiumformedialiteracy.org**

Resources for Media Literacy

Communications Report from Ofcom UK

The UK Office of Communications (Ofcom) recently published a report outlining the steps necessary to ensure that all citizens of the UK benefit fully from communications services.

The report, Citizens and Communications Services, looks at availability, accessibility and affordability of communications services throughout the UK. It also addresses current and future challenges.

"*The report highlights the progress made over the last 10 years in ensuring communications services have kept pace with the changing needs of UK citizens, as well as developments in technology.*

It also assesses the challenges facing Ofcom, Government and industry in ensuring the benefits of the communications market are shared across society and the growing expectations of UK citizens are met." (Ofcom web site).

http://media.ofcom.org.uk/news/2014/citizens-consumers-report/

Also of interest is a critique of the Ofcom report found at the link below.

http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2014/11/03/the-citizen-interest-still-a-thorny-problem-for-ofcom/

Med!aLit Moments

Making News

An important part of understanding the constructedness of media is recognizing that choices are made and that those choices can influence people and society. The decision of what to include and what to leave out is made all the time as media creators struggle to balance competing needs. By enacting the role of news producers and organizing a brief newscast, students experience the process of making the critical choices about what gets aired (or posted) and what is never seen.

Have students feature three top stories in a two minute broadcast.

AHA!: There's not enough time to tell the whole story!

Grade Level: 6-9

Key Question #1 for Producers: What am I authoring?
Core Concept #1: All media is constructed
Key Question #4 for Consumers: What values, lifestyles and points of view are embedded in or omitted from this message?
Key Question #4 for Producers: Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?
Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

Materials: paper and pencils. Access to a stopwatch or timer.

Activity: Place students into small groups so they can work without overhearing the other groups. Ask each group to generate a list of important stories and current events. The list can include local, national or international news, sports, school events, etc. Then ask the team to select the three stories they want to cover in their 2 minute broadcast. Tell them to choose the stories they think their audience will be most interested in (the audience is their classmates). As they draft their scripts, they will need to keep in mind the time limit and should practice to be sure they are on target. Each team can designate a news anchor(s) to broadcast the stories to the class. Designate a class timer to call out "time" when the two minute limit is reached.

One student from each team should explain why their team selected certain stories and certain details and left out others for this particular audience.

Class Reflection: Did multiple teams report the same story? Were there similarities and differences in how they were reported? How do you feel about the choices you made about what to include and what to drop? What insights does this give you about the news you see and hear everyday?

This activity is adapted from CML's *Five Key Questions That Can Change the World.*