

THE Journal of Media Literacy

VOLUME 55, NUMBER 3 • 2008 | 2009



NEW MEDIA, LEARNING & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

AMBROSH • BAINES • BENNETT • CUBAS • FARRIS-BERG • ITO
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NEW MEDIA, LEARNING & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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The Journal of Media Literacy

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The Journal of Media Literacy (first published in 1953 as *Better Broadcasts News* and later as *Telemedium, The Journal of Media Literacy*) is published by the National Telemedia Council (NTC), the oldest media literacy education organization in the United States, having been founded in 1953. *The Journal* reflects the philosophy of NTC, which takes a positive, non-judgmental approach to media literacy education as an essential life skill for the 21st Century. The National Telemedia Council is an organization of diverse professionals interested in the field of media literacy education. NTC encourages free expression of views on all aspects of media literacy in order to encourage learning and increase growth of understanding of issues in Media Literacy. Any opinions expressed in *The Journal* or by individual members of NTC, therefore, do not necessarily represent policies or positions of the National Telemedia Council.

A Letter from the Editors

“Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. ... the single biggest problem facing education today is that our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language...”—Marc Prensky

For many years, those of us who have been working to develop the *field* of media literacy have been talking about the need to break down the language, cultural, and learning barriers between generations. Media literacy has always been much more than just an add-on to the traditional curriculum or simply teaching about and through the media. We have never been satisfied with the over-simplified definition of “access, analyze, evaluate and create.” It was a starting point to begin the conversation. But we knew there was something deeper and richer that we were all striving for, a more meaningful approach to learning that matched the changing culture of the 21st century.

Media literacy is and has always been fundamentally connected to education reform.

Education reform seeks to shake the foundation of the ultimate purpose of education. While there have always been conflicting messages about the role of education, even from within educational institutions, traditionally in the United States, it has been to create literate, functioning workers, consumers, and citizens. Media literacy advocates have usually worked against this traditional view, challenging educators and students to think critically about the language of media, the power structure of the media industry and

larger governing institutions, and the impact of all of this on individuals, society, and culture. Questioning the status quo and empowering students to use media for personal and political change do not always fit comfortably with the traditionalists’ views of “good” citizenship.

Thus, when talking about media literacy and education reform, civic engagement must be a part of the equation. Whereas citizenship is defined most often by political activities and social connections, civic engagement can be viewed more broadly to include attributes of personal empowerment and self-fulfillment that lead to a stronger sense of belonging within a community. In today’s new media generation, a participatory culture is developing that is fundamentally changing the way people communicate, learn, and engage in social and political activities. The institution of education in power today, run by yesterday’s digital immigrants, is not equipped to address the needs of today’s digital natives. As media literacy advocates, we cannot limit our work to drawing a line around what we do in academia while it remains a part of this larger dysfunctional institution; we must embrace what the “new” media literacy is essentially about, striving for authentic education reform and meaningful civic engagement for all.

In this issue, we attempt to pull together the work of innovators in education who understand the connection between the new media landscape, genuine learning, and significant civic engagement. On the following three pages, we lay the pedagogical foundation for this connection with excerpts from the work of three exceptional researchers. University of California, Irvine researcher Mizuko Ito and her team conducted an extensive U.S. study to help us define how youth live and learn with new media. University of Washington professor, Lance Bennett, who is also the founder and director of the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement defines the challenges of connecting the traditional model of the dutiful citizen with the emerging self-actualizing citizen of the digital age. MIT's Henry Jenkins and his Project New Media Literacies team of researchers have culled all of this research to create a list of needed skills for full engagement in today's participatory culture.

We also have tried to include emerging researchers, practitioners, media artists, community organizers, and youthful voices to showcase the developing new media landscape. We have divided this issue into two sections.

EDUCATION REFORM

The field of education is already seeing digital natives who are a part of a new wave of reform, exploring different approaches to bring meaning and significance back into the classroom. Michael Wesch, a cultural anthropologist at Kansas State University is truly a great "explainer" of the impacts of new media on human interaction. Nick Pernisco, Santa Monica College associate professor and educational film producer, along with one of his former students, share the shortcomings they have seen in education and their passion for what is possible in the future. Kate Vannoy, a Milwaukee teacher and instructional designer is creating a new small high school that incorporates individualized educational plans in a virtual project-based learning environment.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Helping youth become civically engaged in today's new media environment is not going to look like the traditional citizenship activities that digital immigrants have in mind. Andrew Slack, founder of the HP Alliance, has connected to youth through a shared passion for the *Harry Potter* stories, using the fictional characters and themes as inspiration for real-world activism. As a public art project, professor and media artist Geri Ulrey built a mobile video booth for people to record "Dear Mr. President" messages for whoever would be elected in November. Two community organizers in Minneapolis and Milwaukee are developing a youth-run social networking site where students can get involved in public discussions on education issues. Paul Baines is working to break through the "Guy Code" that pervades mass media today, often silencing and disengaging young men from open, meaningful dialogue about what it means to be a man. Taking a unique and personal approach to meaning-making through media, Carly Stasko describes how she used creative tools from culture jamming, DIY, and media literacy to transform her own healing during a bout with cancer.

These researchers, artists, community organizers, and teachers are creating a new language of real education reform for an informed, connected, self-actualized citizenry of the future.*



KAREN AMBROSH
NTC PRESIDENT



MARIELI ROWE
EDITOR &
EXEC. DIRECTOR

THE NEW MEDIA LITERACIES

SKILLS NEEDED FOR FULL ENGAGEMENT IN TODAY'S PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

CREATED BY HENRY JENKINS, ET AL, PROJECT NEW MEDIA LITERACIES

Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement. The new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking. These skills build on the foundation of traditional literacy, research skills, technical skills, and critical analysis skills taught in the classroom.

THE NEW SKILLS INCLUDE...

PLAY • the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving

PERFORMANCE • the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery

SIMULATION • the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes

APPROPRIATION • the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content

MULTITASKING • the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details

DISTRIBUTED COGNITION • the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE • the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal

JUDGEMENT • the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources

TRANSMEDIA NAVIGATION • the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities

NETWORKING • the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information

NEGOTIATION • the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms

VISUALIZATION • the ability to interpret and create data representations for the purposes of expressing ideas, finding patterns, and identifying trends

The NML white paper *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, by Henry Jenkins, with Ravi Purushotma, Katherine Clinton, Margaret Weigel, and Alice J. Robison (2006) may be downloaded from the website www.newmedialiteracies.org.

Excerpts from the 2008 Executive Summary of the three-year ethnographic study, a joint project of the University of Southern California and the University of California, Berkeley, funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, examining young people's participation in the new media ecology. (<http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/report>)

Living and Learning with New Media

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE **DIGITAL YOUTH PROJECT**

BY MIZUKO ITO
HEATHER A. HORST
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Social network sites, online games, video-sharing sites, and gadgets such as iPods and mobile phones are now fixtures of youth culture. They have so permeated young lives that it is hard to believe that less than a decade ago these technologies barely existed. Today's youth may be coming of age and struggling for autonomy and identity as did their predecessors, but they are doing so amid new worlds for communication, friendship, play, and self-expression.

Online spaces enable youth to connect with peers in new ways:

FRIENDSHIP-DRIVEN NETWORKS

Most youth use online networks to extend the friendships that they navigate in the familiar contexts of school, religious organizations, sports, and other local activities. They can be "always on," in constant contact with their friends via texting,

instant messaging, mobile phones, and Internet connections. With these "friendship-driven" practices, youth are almost always associating with people they already know in their offline lives. The majority of youth use new media to "hang out" and extend existing friendships in these ways.

INTEREST-DRIVEN NETWORKS

A smaller number of youth also use the online world to explore interests and find information that goes beyond what they have access to at school or in their local community. Online groups enable youth to connect to peers who share specialized and niche interests of various kinds, whether that is online gaming, creative writing, video editing, or other artistic endeavors. In these "interest-driven" networks, youth may find new peers outside the boundaries of their local community. They can also find opportunities to publicize and

distribute their work to online audiences and to gain new forms of visibility and reputation.

SELF-DIRECTED, PEER-BASED LEARNING

In both friendship-driven and interest-driven participation, youth create and navigate new forms of expression and rules for social behavior. In the process, young people acquire various forms of technical and media literacy by exploring new interests, tinkering, and “messing around” with new forms of media....By its immediacy and breadth of information, the digital world lowers barriers to self-directed learning.

Others “geek out” and dive into a topic or talent. Contrary to popular images, geeking out is highly social and engaged, although usually not driven primarily by local friendships. Youth turn instead to specialized knowledge groups of both teens and adults from around the country or world, with the goal of improving their craft and gaining reputation among expert peers....Geeking out in many respects erases the traditional markers of status and authority.

New media allow for a degree of freedom and autonomy for youth that is less apparent in a classroom setting. Youth respect one another’s authority online, and they are often more motivated to learn from peers than from adults. Their efforts are also largely self-directed, and the outcome emerges through exploration, in contrast to classroom learning that is oriented toward set, predefined goals.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS, PARENTS, AND POLICYMAKERS

New media forms have altered how youth socialize and learn, and this raises a new set of issues that educators, parents, and policymakers should consider.

Social and recreational new media use as a site of learning.

...Youth could benefit from educators being more open to forms of experimentation and social exploration that are generally not characteristic of educational institutions.

Recognizing important distinctions in youth culture and literacy.

...diversity in forms of literacy means that it is problematic to develop a standardized set of benchmarks to measure levels of new media and technical literacy.

Capitalizing on peer-based learning.

...adults can still have tremendous influence in setting “learning goals,” particularly on the interest-driven side, where adult hobbyists function as role models and more experienced peers.

A new role for education? Youths’ participation in this networked world suggests new ways of thinking about the role of education. What would it mean to really exploit the potential of the learning opportunities available through online resources and networks? Rather than assuming that education is primarily about preparing for jobs and careers, what would it mean to think of it as a process guiding youths’ participation in public life more generally? Finally, what would it mean to enlist help in this endeavor from engaged and diverse publics that are broader than what we traditionally think of as educational and civic institutions?*

Lead author MIZUKO (MIMI) ITO is a cultural anthropologist specializing in media technology use by children and youth. She holds an MA in Anthropology, a Ph.D. in Education and a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Stanford University.



Excerpts from

Civic Learning in Changing Democracies

CHALLENGES FOR CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC EDUCATION

BY W. LANCE BENNETT

... **M**ost policy makers define and fund civic education programs...based on highly conventional citizen models which center around the idea of the "Dutiful Citizen" (DC). At a minimum, the DC is expected to learn about the basic workings of government and related political institutions, to understand the values of the national civic culture, to become informed about issues and make responsible voting choices. The challenge for civic education, simply put, is how to integrate and adapt these conventional DC virtues to the changing civic orientations of the new "self-Actualizing Citizen" (AC) who may see her political

activities and commitments in highly personal terms that contribute more to enhancing the quality of personal life, social recognition, self esteem, or friendship relations, than to understanding, support, and involvement in government. The table below offers a preliminary contrast between the AC and DC models of citizenship.

...Simply arguing for one model over another will not serve much purpose...The Dutiful Citizen continues to have obvious appeal, particularly to educational policy makers, based on the reasonable perception that citizen activities centered on

THE DIVIDED CITIZENRY: THE TRADITIONAL CIVIC EDUCATION IDEAL OF THE DUTIFUL CITIZEN (DC) VS. THE EMERGING YOUTH EXPERIENCE OF SELF-ACTUALIZING CITIZENSHIP (AC)

ACTUALIZING CITIZEN (AC)	DUTIFUL CITIZEN (DC)
Diminished sense of government obligation – higher sense of individual purpose	Obligation to participate in government centered activities
Voting is less meaningful than other, more personally defined acts such as consumerism, community volunteering, or transnational activism	Voting is the core democratic act
Mistrust of media and politicians is reinforced by negative mass media environment	Becomes informed about issues and government by following mass media
Favors loose networks of community action – often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies	Joins civil society organizations and/or expresses interests through parties that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilize supporters

voting and (at least somewhat) informed opinion are necessary to instill in new generations in order to ensure the viability of democratic polities. At the same time, recognizing that young citizens today may have substantially different social and political experiences than their elders did at comparable stages of life also seems important to incorporate into models of civic education.

...I suggest various ways in which the logic of civic education from the policy level to the classroom may begin to address this issue of changing citizen roles without sacrificing the focus on DC skills and activities. In particular, I suggest a heuristic approach to engaging young citizens in their educational environments through four sequential steps toward civic engagement, each involving a communication process that enables the individual learner to define her own relationship to:

1. meaningful issues that enable personal identification
2. relevant information that motivates rather than discourages linking the issue to government
3. other (citizen) learners who may provide peer recognition and political support for initiatives involving the issue
4. and available citizen pathways to effective governmental action on the issue.

The goal here is not to turn AC individuals into DC citizens, but to allow some appreciation for DC civic life to grow from personally meaningful AC origins.

...Developing a highly individualized sense of politics may not be regarded as a problem in the AC world, but it is often seen as antithetical to the DC view of the democratic polity. In order to

counter the perils of isolation through overly personalized digital media experiences, the learning environment for next generation citizens must be designed to appeal to the affinity for networks and communities of interest....This sense of common engagement with one's own and with others' issues introduces the experience of being part of a public as a core element of the learning process.

...Research on the learning environments preferred by "DotNets" suggests that there are a number of fundamental changes that can be introduced productively into the traditional learning environment. ...the key to the successful introduction of technology in the learning environment is not just delivering hardware or software applications, but reorganizing the social and psychological contexts in which they are used.

...conventional civics education often treats the subject matter as: a) another academic subject, b) with right and wrong responses arbitrated by the teacher as central authority, and c) students competing in isolation for academic favor.

...learning environments that emphasize old style, fact based, teacher-centered pedagogy may succeed in imparting abstract facts and skills of the sort that can be tested, but, ...they do not help young citizens translate that knowledge into later civic practice. Perhaps the message here is that providing learners with tools to experience actual civic practice in the learning environment makes more sense.*

Founder and director of the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, LANCE BENNETT has a Ph.D. in political science from Yale University and is the Ruddick C. Lawrence Professor of Communication and Professor of Political Science at the University of Washington.



REVISITING

A Vision of Students Today

Originally published online at Britannica.com Brave New Classroom 2.0 New Blog Forum

BY MICHAEL WESCH

In spring 2007 I invited the 200 students enrolled in the “small” version of my “Introduction to Cultural Anthropology” class to tell the world what they think of their education by helping me write a script for a video to be posted on YouTube. The result was the disheartening portrayal of disengagement you’ll see within the movie’s screenshots included with this article. The video was viewed over one million times in its first month and was the most blogged about video in the blogosphere for several weeks, eliciting thousands of comments. With rare exception, educators around the world expressed the sad sense of profound identification with the scene, sparking a wide-ranging debate about the roles and responsibilities of teachers, students, and technology in the classroom.

Despite my role in the production of the video, and the thousands of comments supporting it, I recently came to view the video with a sense of uneasiness and even incredulity. Surely it can’t be as bad as the video seems to suggest, I thought. I started wrestling with these doubts over the summer as I fondly recalled the powerful learning experiences I had shared with my students the previous year.

By the end of the summer I had become convinced that the video was over the top, that things were really not so bad, that the system is not as broken as I thought, and we should all just stop

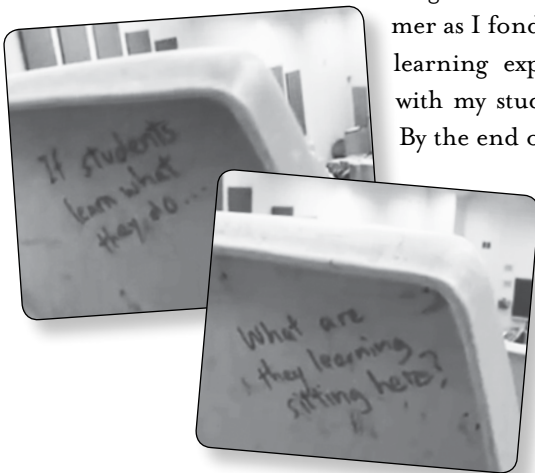
worrying and get on with our teaching. But when I walked into my classroom for the first day of school two weeks ago I was immediately reminded of the real problem now facing education. The problem is not just “written on the walls.” It’s built into them.

I arrived early, finding 493 empty numbered chairs sitting mindlessly fixated on the front of the room. A 600 square foot screen stared back at them. Hundreds of students would soon fill the chairs, but the carefully designed sound-absorbing walls and ceiling, along with state of the art embedded speakers, ensured that there would only be one person in this room to be heard. That person would be me, pacing around somewhere near stage-left, ducking intermittently behind a small podium housing a computer with a wireless gyromouse that will grant me control of some 786,432 points of light on that massive screen.

The room is nothing less than a state of the art information dump, a physical manifestation of the all too pervasive yet narrow and naïve assumption that to learn is simply to acquire information, built for teachers to effectively carry out the relatively simple task of conveying information. Its sheer size, layout, and technology are testaments to the efficiency and expediency with which we can now provide students with their required credit hours.

My class is popular. We only enroll 400 so there should have been plenty of seats but on the first day all seats were filled and it was standing room only in the back. The room was buzzing with energy as friends reconnected after the long summer.

IF STUDENTS
LEARN WHAT
THEY DO...
WHAT ARE
THEY LEARNING
SITTING HERE?



I started talking and an almost deafening silence greeted my first words. I have always been amazed and intimidated by this silence. It seems to so tenuously await my next words. The silence is immediately filled with the more subtle yet powerful messages sent by 500 sets of eyes which I continuously scan, "listening" to what they have to say as I talk. In an instant those eyes can turn from wonder and excitement to the disheartening glaze of universal and irreversible disengagement. Perpetually dreading this glaze I nervously pace as I talk and use grandiose gestures. At times I feel desperate for their attention. I rush to amuse them with jokes and stories as I swing, twist, and swirl that gyromouse, directing the 786,432 pixels dancing points of light behind me, hoping to dazzle them with a multi-media extravaganza.

Somehow I seem to hold their attention for the full hour. I marvel at what a remarkable achievement it is to bring hundreds of otherwise expressive, exuberant, and often rebellious youths into a single room and have them sit quietly in straight rows while they listen to the authority with the microphone. Such an achievement could not be won by an eager teacher armed with technology alone. It has taken years of acclimatizing our youth to stale artificial environments, piles of propaganda convincing them that what goes on inside these environments is of immense importance, and a steady hand of discipline should they ever start to question it. Alfred North Whitehead called it "soul murder."

THE "GETTING BY" GAME

Reports from my teaching assistants sitting in the back of the room tell a different story. Apparently, several students standing in the back cranked up their iPods as I started to lecture and never turned them off, sometimes even breaking out into dance. My lecture could barely be heard nearby as the sound-absorbing panels and state of the art speakers were apparently no match for those blaring iPods. Scanning the room my assistants also saw students cruising Facebook, instant messaging, and texting their friends. The students were undoubtedly engaged, just not with me.

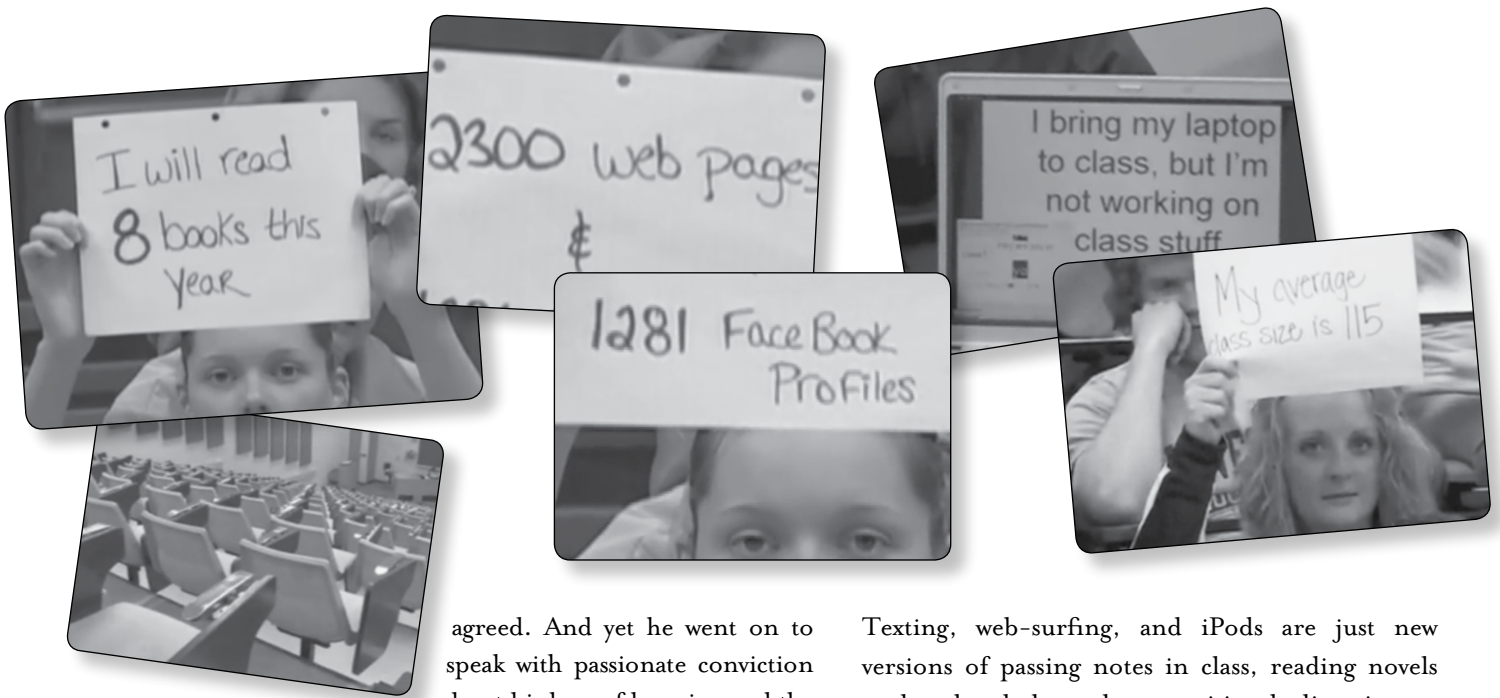
My teaching assistants consoled me by noting that students have learned that they can "get by" without paying attention in their classes. Perhaps feeling a bit encouraged by my look of incredulity, my TA's continued with a long list of other activities students have learned that they can "get by" without doing. Studying, taking notes, reading the textbook, and coming to class topped the list. It wasn't the list that impressed me. It was the unquestioned assumption that "getting by" is the name of the game. Our students are so alienated by education that they are trying to sneak right past it.

If you think this little game is unfair to those students who have been duped into playing, consider those who have somehow managed to maintain their inherent desire to learn. One of the most thoughtful and engaged students I have ever met recently confronted a professor about the nuances of some questions on a multiple choice exam. The professor politely explained to the student that he was "overthinking" the questions. What kind of environment is this in which "overthinking" is a problem? Apparently he would have been better off just playing along with the "getting by" game.

Last spring I asked my students how many of them did not like school. Over half of them raised their hands. When I asked how many of them did not like learning, no hands were raised. I have tried this with faculty and get similar results. Last year's U.S. Professor of the Year, Chris Sorensen, began his acceptance speech by announcing, "I hate school." The crowd, made up largely of other outstanding faculty, overwhelmingly

Dubbed "the explainer" by *Wired* magazine, MICHAEL WESCH is a cultural anthropologist at Kansas State University exploring the impacts of new media on human interaction. He is also a member of Britannica's Editorial Board of Advisors. After two years studying the impacts of writing on a remote indigenous culture in the rainforest of Papua New Guinea, he has turned his attention to the effects of social media and digital technology on global society. His videos on technology, education, and information have been viewed over ten million times and are frequently featured at international film festivals and major academic conferences. Wesch has won several major awards for his work, including a *Wired* Rave Award and the John Calkin Award for Outstanding Praxis in Media Ecology. He has also won several teaching awards, including the 2008 CASE/Carnegie U.S. Professor of the Year for Doctoral and Research Universities.





agreed. And yet he went on to speak with passionate conviction about his love of learning and the desire to spread that love. And there's the rub. We love learning. We hate school. What's worse is that many of us hate school because we love learning.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

How did institutions designed for learning become so widely hated by people who love learning?

The video seemed to represent what so many were already feeling, and it became the focal point for many theories. While some simply blamed the problems on the students themselves, others recognized a broader pattern. Most blamed technology, though for very different reasons. Some simply suggested that new technologies are too distracting and superficial and that they should be banned from the classroom. Others suggested that students are now "wired" differently. Created in the image of these technologies, luddites imagine students to be distracted and superficial while techno-optimists see a new generation of hyper-thinkers bored with old school ways.

But the problems are not new. They are the same as those identified by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner nearly 40 years ago when they described the plight of "totally alienated students" involved in a cheating scandal (a true art form in the "getting by" game) and asked, "What kind of vicious game is being played here, and who are the sinners and who the sinned against?" (1969:51).

Texting, web-surfing, and iPods are just new versions of passing notes in class, reading novels under the desk, and surreptitiously listening to Walkmans. They are not the problem. They are just the new forms in which we see it. Fortunately, they allow us to see the problem in a new way, and more clearly than ever, if we are willing to pay attention to what they are really saying.

They tell us, first of all, that despite appearances, our classrooms have been fundamentally changed. There is literally something in the air, and it is nothing less than the digital artifacts of over one billion people and computers networked together collectively producing over 2,000 gigabytes of new information per second. While most of our classrooms were built under the assumption that information is scarce and hard to find, nearly the entire body of human knowledge now flows through and around these rooms in one form or another, ready to be accessed by laptops, cellphones, and iPods. Classrooms built to re-enforce the top-down authoritative knowledge of the teacher are now enveloped by a cloud of ubiquitous digital information where knowledge is made, not found, and authority is continuously negotiated through discussion and participation. In short, they tell us that our walls no longer mark the boundaries of our classrooms.

And that's what has been wrong all along. Some time ago we started taking our walls too seriously—not just the walls of our classrooms, but also the metaphorical walls that we have constructed around



our “subjects,” “disciplines,” and “courses.” McLuhan’s statement about the bewildered child confronting “the education establishment where information is scarce but ordered and structured by fragmented, classified patterns, subjects, and schedules” still holds true in most classrooms today. The walls have become so prominent that they are even reflected in our language, so that today there is something called “the real world” which is foreign and set apart from our schools. When somebody asks a question that seems irrelevant to this real world, we say that it is “merely academic.”

Not surprisingly, our students struggle to find meaning and significance inside these walls. They tune out of class, and log on to Facebook.

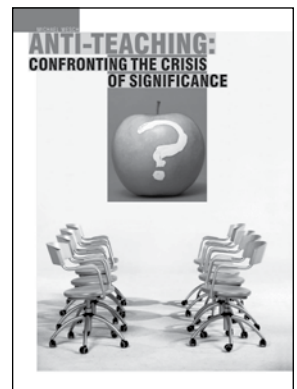
THE SOLUTION

Fortunately, the solution is simple. We don’t have to tear the walls down. We just have to stop pretending that the walls separate us from the world, and begin working with students in the pursuit of answers to real and relevant questions.

When we do that we can stop denying the fact that we are enveloped in a cloud of ubiquitous digital information where the nature and dynamics of knowledge have shifted. We can acknowledge that most of our students have powerful devices on them that give them instant and constant access to this cloud (including almost any answer to almost any multiple choice question you can imagine). We can welcome laptops, cell phones, and iPods into our classrooms, not as distractions, but as powerful

learning technologies. We can use them in ways that empower and engage students in real world problems and activities, leveraging the enormous potentials of the digital media environment that now surrounds us. In the process, we allow students to develop much-needed skills in navigating and harnessing this new media environment, including the wisdom to know when to turn it off. When students are engaged in projects that are meaningful and important to them, and that make them feel meaningful and important, they will enthusiastically turn off their cellphones and laptops to grapple with the most difficult texts and take on the most rigorous tasks.

There are many faculty around the world who have enthusiastically embraced the challenge to bring meaning and significance back into the classroom. Many of them are featured in this journal. If you are interested in the specifics of how I attempt to solve the significance problem in the large class featured in the video and discussed in this post, check out the World Simulation, a project in which students explore the dynamics of how the world works in order to create a simulation recreating the past 500 years of history and exploring 100 years into the future. I discuss the project and my use of technology in detail in A Portal to Media Literacy, available on YouTube, and in the essay, “Anti-Teaching: Confronting the Crisis of Significance.”*



Daniel's Story of Education

SUCCESSES AND ROADBLOCKS

My name is Daniel Cubas. I was born blind and with cerebral palsy. I started school in Los Angeles when I was six years old. As a child, I tried to learn Braille, but I was never able to because of the cerebral palsy. I still did a lot of reading. My homework was to answer each question at the end of a story. I would have two tapes, one would have the short story and the questions, and the other one would be blank for me to dictate my answers. I also took spelling by the same process. The tests were done verbally. At the age of nine or ten, I learned how to use computers. By the time I went to junior high, I had received an award for using the computer well.

In middle school, I tried going to an integrated junior high, but left because the teasing was so bad from both disabled and non-disabled students. And the teachers offered no support. I missed many days of school and got behind. I went to another special education center as

I had done when I was in elementary school. The first year was fine. However, the next semester, we started to read a history book. For the next three years, we kept reading that same book. Also, I did math problems that I had done when I was nine years old. I don't know what kept me at that school. I did not like it. There was no homework. After a year of fighting with one of my teachers, I decided to go to a regular high school. It was so much better. Once more, I was starting to do my work on the computer. I got up to speed and I graduated a year and a half later with a diploma and with honors. It was overwhelming catching up, but I do not regret it.

I had to continue to advocate for myself in college. I had to explain to professors over and over about my disability. Most of them understood, except for one math professor. I asked him to explain what he was doing on the board, but

he never did. I was completely lost and frustrated. People did not know how to teach me math. By this time, my teachers were sending me my homework assignments by email. I would also send them my completed work in this way, but not in this math class. I dropped it. My major was broadcasting. In a required broadcasting class, I fell behind because I had to "watch" videos and write what I "saw." I had scribes for every class I took in college, but the scribe that I had for this class did not know how to meet my special needs and I failed. The only way that I was able to finish college and obtain a degree was because they substituted the math class for a speech class in which I did really well. Also, they substituted the broadcasting class for a journalism class. How do I feel about my education after all these

years? I feel frustrated. I plan to write a book about my life someday.



SOCIAL CHANGE FOR SOCIAL NETWORKING

I was always interested in how social networking websites worked ever since they started to spring up. After months of hearing all the good things about MySpace, I decided to create an account. It was easy. The only thing I did not like was the captia. This is the security system a site uses to verify that the person entering the site is a person and not a spammer. You are asked to type the characters that appear in an image. One of my brothers had to help me out. BlogSpot uses this same system, however, for blind users there is a link that says listen to the characters. This is one simple example of how access to media can be difficult for people with disabilities. I was frustrated with MySpace and decided to be done with it.

Then I tried blogging, Skype, Facebook, and Youtube which were much better. I am able to comment on other people's blogs, and I know when someone has left me a comment on mine. I post videos on my blog, send my blog address to the

new people I meet in Skype, and I use Facebook to make all these come together.

However, I am now ready to develop my own website, a space where everyone will come together and be able to get to know me. After hearing politicians only talk about the rich and middle class people, after seeing websites inaccessible to the disabled, and after hearing so much about why the disabled community can't do this or that, I have become tired. My dream has always been to live in a world where everyone helps one another, a world where the internet is accessible to all. Am I too idealistic? Do I strive for perfection? The answer is yes. This world is not going to be perfect. I know that. What I want is to teach people to see life from a different perspective. Through my writings, I want people to see what it is like to be disabled. My website will be like the world I dream about. It will have things in Braille, describe videos



for those who can't see, a blog of my thoughts and experiences, resources to help people with disabilities, a radio show, pictures with text, and so

much more. I strongly believe that this can be done. If I want to see change, I need to start with my own work. Hopefully, others will learn from me, and they will change things for the benefit of all. At first, the change will happen in the internet world, but it will lead to change in the real world also.*

DANIEL CUBAS, a recent graduate from Santa Monica College with an Associate in Arts degree, is a musician, a radio show host, makes and sells his own t-shirts at stores like Kitson... and is blind. Nick Pernisco, one of Daniel's former professors, created a documentary that follows Daniel as he discusses his successes and roadblocks on his journey to achieving his goals. Daniel is hoping to attend a broadcasting school that has promised to tailor the coursework to his abilities and prepare him to work at a radio station. The only problem is that the program costs just over \$10,000, money that Daniel doesn't have. It's a touching and uplifting story that will surely inspire all who watch it. You can watch the documentary in its entirety here: <http://carmelinafilms.com/daniel.htm>

New Media and the Coming Changes in Education

BY NICK PERNISCO

When I was growing up as a child in the 1980's, I couldn't help but to be excited about the new technology and media around me. I was raised on a steady diet of television, video games, and computers, and so it's no wonder that technology and media were strong influences on who I am today. Technology influenced my career goals of being a digital media producer, wanting to record and edit audio and video using the wonderful new tools just emerging when I started. And when I began teaching media courses, I knew that technology would be a large part of what I taught. But until recently, I never thought that technology could be more than just a teaching tool. Beyond just using a CD player to play music or a DVD player to watch a movie, technology has proved itself a great way to relate to today's youth, most of whom are even more tech savvy and media saturated than I was.

WHAT IF WE COULD INCREASE LITERACY RATES ... AND OVERALL LEARNING BY JUST LISTENING TO THE KIDS?

Today's young people have been using computers since they were three or four, and sometimes earlier than that. They've been watching TV ever since their parents first propped them on their laps,

learning about culture through the magic window. And they've been online and using cell phones for as long as they can remember. They spend more time on social networks like MySpace and Facebook than they do doing homework. Whenever they have a question about their homework, they skip their parents and find the answers in a place that holds all of the answers: Google. And when young people need to contact a friend, they do it with a text message on their cell phones, using acronyms like LOL and abbreviations like "U" instead of "you". Clearly, young people interact with the world in a new way.

Many parents and other concerned adults I've spoken with believe that this is the end of the world as we know it. Literacy rates are spiraling downward. Kids don't know basic spelling or grammar anymore. Many adults are quick to blame technology and the media. After all, when they can be instantly gratified by Google or Wikipedia, why should kids put in the extra effort to go to the library to do "quality research"? But what if it's not the kids that are failing, but instead it's us who are failing them? What if the teachers and parents who are so adamant about kids following the rules of life simply don't realize that the rules are changing, and that kids are the ones changing them? What if we could increase literacy rates, SAT

scores, high school graduation rates, and overall learning by just listening to the kids? The world is changing quickly, and the world our children will inherit will be quite different from the one we leave behind.

What we need most in 21st century education is a new way of teaching tomorrow's citizens. While we rely on textbooks written by "experts" to teach children about the world, today's youth rely on social networks assembled by people like them to teach them about life. Instead of one person deciding what is right or wrong, an entire community decides. Today's youth uses technology to research facts and opinions, and unlike with textbooks, they have a say in where those facts and opinions come from. Instead of a single expert on a particular topic, kids rely on millions of witnesses to events and issues, helping to form a collective intelligence that gives them a broader perspective. Additionally, instead of cramming their brains with a huge amount of facts, terms, and data, we should be teaching kids how to search through the data to come to their own conclusions. We should be teaching kids research skills, not research results.

We need a new way of looking at the media and technology being consumed by kids. We should stop looking at playing video games as an activity that "rots their brains," and instead look at the data that suggests that kids are actually smarter, more physically agile, and better socially adjusted when they play video games. We should stop saying that texting is ruining the English language, and start realizing that the English language is changing, just as it has for hundreds of years. We should be happy that kids are learning to put their thoughts into concise, 160 character messages, as they do with texting and Twitter. Instead of telling kids

that too much time spent on social networking is bad for them, we should encourage them, since this will likely be the way we communicate in the future (not to mention the way that elections will be won). They're learning to communicate using methods that are quickly becoming highly valued in our society. Adults need to accept this reality. Then I will be able to do the job I believe is needed as an educator, embracing technology and media in education.

WHAT WE NEED MOST IN 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION IS A NEW WAY OF TEACHING TOMORROW'S CITIZENS.

No matter what subject I'm teaching, my classrooms are always filled with technology. Whether I'm teaching an Introduction to Communications course, or a Radio Production class, I use technology to better relate to students. As an example, assignments and projects traditionally written on paper are now being delivered online. There is no point in having students keep a written journal if they can keep a blog to accomplish the same objective. Instead of turning in a CD or DVD of a finished project, students now create MP3 files and e-mail them to me. Not only does this allow students to use the skills they already know to complete a project, but it also saves money, saves

NICK PERNISCO is an Associate Professor of Broadcasting and Communication at Santa Monica College, and a Media Lecturer at California State University, Northridge. Before teaching, Mr. Pernisco was a media professional working in the radio and music industries. He is the founder of Understand Media, a media literacy advocacy organization, and he is founder and executive producer at Carmelina Films, a production company specializing in educational documentaries and television programming. Mr. Pernisco has produced numerous videos about media literacy and media education, and he frequently speaks at conferences nationwide about the benefits of melding media, technology, and education.



time, and helps save the environment. Students are encouraged to use laptops in class to keep notes, and later upload those notes to Wikis for review by the rest of the class. My classrooms contain less lecturing and more discussion, allowing students to discuss new ideas and concepts with each other. My role turns from “know it all expert” to moderator, and this earns students’ respect and makes them want to learn. Difficult concepts become fun, boring lectures become interesting, and learning actually happens.

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THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THIS IS HAPPENING
LITTLE BY LITTLE TODAY.

I’m often asked to speak at conferences about using technology in the classroom. I enjoy talking to teachers of all grade levels, and sharing my thoughts on technology’s role in the future of education. I also speak directly with students and ask them how their learning environments can be improved. At the recent Media Literacy Café held jointly at Santa Monica College and via teleconference with Audubon High School in Wisconsin, I asked the local students a simple question: “What can make you want to learn?” One response I received was “Learning has to be fun.” So I asked them if they thought learning Math, English, and Science could be fun. This started a discussion about how students want to have an active role in their education. They want to use things like texting, video games, and social networks to learn. My own research and classroom experiments have shown

that this type of learning is possible. We can use technology and media to teach kids the skills they need to succeed, but this will take some initiative on the part of teachers. It’ll take a fundamental shift in pedagogy. The good news is that this is happening little by little today.

Teachers around the country are starting to find new ways to teach today’s young people. I belong to a social network for teachers using technology to make learning a better experience. The community called Classroom 2.0 has over 15,000 teachers as members. Some are already technology experts, using technology to help change students lives. But most teachers on Classroom 2.0 are still trying to find their way. Just like their students do on MySpace, Classroom 2.0 allows teachers to post their profiles, chat in discussion forums, write blogs, exchange ideas, and create new knowledge. A teacher shares a single idea, that idea is discussed by other teachers, and in the end an entirely new idea is formed. This is collective intelligence, and it’s how our students are becoming smart about the world. At Classroom 2.0, teachers not only learn new ways to teach students, but they’re learning in the same way that today’s students learn.

Education is changing – of this we have no doubt. The skills and abilities that students need in order to succeed in life are different. As teachers, we have responsibilities to meet students on this new playing field. Only then, will we be able to increase learning, raise success rates, and produce students prepared for the challenges that await them in the 21st century. I’m proud to be involved at the forefront of this coming change, and I hope others will join me to help make our educational system better.*

Authentic Learning Online

BY KATE VANNOY, PH.D.

Online learning has had an enormous effect on my life over the last ten years. It began with my own education and then spilled over into the education of my students. This powerful steamroller of learning does not stop for common educational obstacles or learning styles. It plows through gender, reading levels, and cognitive abilities to pave the way for increased communication and authentic assessment opportunities for all students. Whether it is used independently as a complete course or blended with traditional classroom activities, online learning is a powerful tool that can have an impact on some of the educational reform issues schools face today.

As a new teacher with a young family I had more drive than time to increase my education. Online learning offered me the opportunity to obtain a masters degree and the passion to continue on to the completion of a research

dissertation. As an undergrad, I struggled through ten years of unsatisfying educational experiences. Only when I discovered my place in the world of online education did I shed the inhibitions and pain of traditional educational experiences to gain confidence and knowledge rapidly and with much fervor.

I was so delighted with the freedom and personal nature of this new form of learning that I went a bit overboard. Taking classes just to take another online class asking: "Are all online courses this good? Can they all satisfy my educational needs?"

KATE VANNOY, Ph.D. is an Instructional Technology Leader and Teacher at Audubon Technology and Communication Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She incorporates online learning activities into her face-to-face curricula with the philosophy that a wide range of learning experiences will provide all students with more opportunities to succeed.



Sadly, no not all did. This reality started my quest for finding out what makes quality online courses so good while others fall so horribly short. Where does one start? I decided to start at the beginning with the work of instructional designers who facilitate learning and create traditional and non-traditional educational tools.

I dove into research that might tell me how instructional designers create online learning spaces- that was overwhelming. So I narrowed my research down to one question; how do instructional designers use a course management system (CMS)? Course management systems, such as Moodle, Blackboard, or D2L, are software systems that offer a collection of tools for assessment, communication, uploading and downloading of content, students' work, administration of student groups, tracking and grading. To learn about the educational possibilities for a CMS, I studied how instructional designers make use of all these

tools. After conducting a survey, I found that a course management system provides opportunities to enhance pedagogy; the system's tools and the instructional designer's role all impact curricular decisions; and finally, CMS activities and strategies align with learning objectives.

The study explained that instructional designers showed adaptability and flexibility in their use of the ADDIE model of instructional design (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate) when using a course management system. Previous research shows that instructional designers use the ADDIE model freely as it relates to each project independently. The data I collected supports this idea. Ultimately, the needs of students, teachers, administrators, and clients whom instructional designers serve impact their decisions.

The success or failure of an online course then depends on how well the designer reads the needs



of his/her audience. This is true of any educational experience- but the online world opens up the audience and addresses several needs of diverse learners with the same strokes of the keyboard. For example- if a student needs extra time to process information- who is to say he or she cannot take it? No one is rushing through the content to squeeze the full lecture into the 45 minutes allotted in a traditional face-to-face course. Online, there are no time constraints. If I take twenty minutes to read a passage and you only take five, the rest of the class knows no difference. I can watch a video to supplement the reading, a video that you may not need to watch. You may be the type of student who questions everything and therefore cross-references something from the reading- just to make sure the teacher has it right or to argue a point missed. As a classmate online, I may not have caught what you did, but I read your challenge to the teacher and cheer you on. The information passes through us both, but in very different ways.

A course management system affords great opportunity to enhance pedagogy and provide tools needed to meet authentic learning objectives. Teachers who use it can design instruction to meet the diverse needs and learning styles of students. Students who may not be comfortable in the traditional face-to-face classroom can find themselves comfortable accessing, sharing and expressing themselves online. Teachers, students and online tools are already ingrained in education. Introducing and bringing teachers and students together through a course management system seems a natural progression. I am excited to participate in the evolution of this relationship between teachers, students and online learning at my school where we have just opened a small charter high school to complement an already successful middle school program.

In the fall of 2008, at Audubon Technology and Communication Center High School, we



welcomed our first class of ninth-graders. Due to the high number of computer and technology classes at the middle school, the staff and students are already highly skilled in both technology and communication. At the high school level, students will be exposed to rigorous project-based activities that will be managed in an online course management system. The emphasis will be on how technology is used as a tool for learning, not just the technology itself. During the first two years, the students will be guided through a scaffolded curriculum that will develop them as independent learners. This will prepare students for internships and online coursework in their final years, further enhanced by college distance learning and other learner-centered programs. A focus on individualization for student success in learning will occur when student, parent and staff complete the Personalized Education Plan (PEP) that will outline the student's career goals and document progress toward achieving those goals.

This educational setting emphasizes flexibility for individual learning styles. It provides the opportunity for improved communication and authentic assessment practices. In this setting, I am able to apply my instructional design research creatively. Through our modest efforts in a small learning community, we hope to build a sound pedagogical model of an authentic diverse learning environment. We must move away from the 20th century factory model of schooling with all of its obvious limitations. It is time to take advantage of the tools of new media and our knowledge of solid instructional design to create an individualized model of learning that reduces the barriers of time and place. This approach will bring about real literacy and learning, the much needed education reform of the 21st Century. *



KATE ASKED HER 9TH GRADERS TO TALK ABOUT THEIR ONLINE EXPERIENCES. THEY ANSWERED WITH BREVITY AND HONESTY IN THE COMMUNICATION STYLE OF TODAY'S YOUTH:

HOW DO YOU ACCESS INFORMATION AND NEWS?

I usually learn everything I know from the internet. You'll find me reading on the internet almost all of the time.

WHEN YOU FIND SOMETHING INTERESTING, DO YOU SHARE IT? HOW AND WITH WHOM?

so i showed my teacher Miss. Dyer.

If I find something I think is interesting, I will usually share it with my sister, mom, or dad by telling them about it.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE YOURSELF ONLINE?

HOW DO YOU ACCESS INFORMATION AND NEWS?

I usually learn everything I know from the internet. You'll find me reading on the internet almost all of the time.

okay.

HOW DO YOU EXPRESS YOURSELF ONLINE?

telling them about struggles ive had. i guess

I don't really express myself online very much. I have a Myspace that I barely ever go on but usually by email. I also have a few websites that I haven't updated in a while that tells the world what i'm up to. People can usually tell how I am doing by the voice in my words and word choice.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF YOUR SCHOOL'S INTERNET FILTERING SYSTEM? DOES IT PROTECT YOU? DOES IT LIMIT YOU?

its real good sometimes but you guys should unblock a few websites after school. for ex. myspace project playlist and game websites. i would really respect that.

i think it just limits us... because the majority of the times that we find something interestin for a project or something... its blocked. im really not sure how they protect us.

I have to be honest. I really hate the internet filtering system. I'm glad it blocks me from inappropriate websites that I get led into but it gets in my way so much. It even blocks a lot of educational websites and it's hard to find the information i'm looking for. I think the district OVER blocks websites.

How “Dumbledore’s Army” Is Transforming Our World

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE HARRY POTTER ALLIANCE’S FOUNDER,
ANDREW SLACK

by Henry Jenkins

“WE DO NOT NEED MAGIC TO CHANGE THE WORLD, WE CARRY ALL THE POWER WE NEED INSIDE OURSELVES ALREADY: WE HAVE THE POWER TO IMAGINE BETTER.”

—JK Rowling, at Harvard Commencement Speech 2008

The Harry Potter Alliance has adopted an unconventional approach to civic engagement—mobilizing J.K. Rowling’s best-selling *Harry Potter* fantasy novels as a platform for political transformation, linking together traditional activist groups with new style social networks and with fan communities. Its youthful founder, Andrew Slack, wants to create a “Dumbledore’s Army” for the real world, adopting fantastical and playful metaphors rather than the language of insider politics, to capture the imagination and change the minds of young Americans. In the process, he is creating a new kind of media

literacy education—one which teaches us to re-read and rewrite the contents of popular culture to reverse engineer our society. One can’t argue with the success of this group which has deployed podcasts and Facebook to capture the attention of more than 100,000 people, mobilizing them to contribute to the struggles against genocide in Darfur or the battles for workers’ rights at Wal-Mart or the campaign against Proposition 8 in California.

The *Harry Potter* novels taught a generation to read and to write (through fan fiction); *Harry Potter* now may be teaching that same generation how to change their society. The *Harry Potter* novels depicted its youth protagonists questioning adult authority, fighting evil, and standing up for their rights. It offers inspirational messages about empowerment and transformation which can fuel meaningful civic action in our own world. For example, in July 2007, the group worked with the Leaky Cauldron, one of the most popular *Harry*

Potter news sites, to organize house parties around the country focused on increasing awareness of the Sudanese genocide. Participants listened to and discussed a podcast which featured real-world political experts—such as Joe Wilson, former U.S. ambassador; John Prendergast, senior advisor to the International Crisis Group; and Dot Maver, executive director of the Peace Alliance—alongside performances by Wizard Rock groups such as *Harry and the Potters*, *The Whomping Willows*, *Draco and the Malfoys*, and the *Parselmouths*. The HP Alliance has created a new form of civic engagement which allows participants to reconcile their activist identities with the pleasurable fantasies that brought the fan community together in the first place.

In this interview, Slack spells out what he calls the “Dumbledore Doctrine,” explores how J.K. Rowling infused the fantasy novels with what she had learned as an activist for Amnesty International, and describes how the books have become the springboard for his own campaign for social change. Along the way, he offers insights which may be helpful to other groups who want to build a bridge from participatory culture to participatory culture.

Q CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT THE HP ALLIANCE IS, AND WHAT ITS CORE GOALS ARE?

A The Harry Potter Alliance, or the HP Alliance is an organization that uses online organizing to educate and mobilize Harry Potter fans toward being engaged in issues around self empowerment as well as social justice, by using parallels from the books. With the help of a whole network of fan sites and Harry Potter themed bands, we reach about 100,000 people across the world. The main parallel we draw on comes from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* where Harry starts an underground activist group called “Dumbledore’s Army” to wake the Ministry of Magic

up to the fact that Voldemort has returned. The HP Alliance strives to be a Dumbledore’s Army for the real world that is trying to wake the world up to ending the genocide in Darfur.

Recently we have expanded our scope, discussing human rights atrocities in Eastern Burma, and we’re going to be incorporating the Congo into our vision soon. The parallels don’t stop with this notion of Dumbledore’s Army waking the world up to injustice. The Harry Potter books hit on issues of racism toward people who are not “pure blooded” Wizards just as our world continues to not treat people equally based on race. House elves are exploited the way that many employers treat their workers in both sweat shops in developing nations and even in superstores like Wal-Mart. Indigenous groups like the Centaurs are not treated equally just as indigenous groups in our world are not treated equally. And just as many in our world feel the need to hide in the closet due to their sexual orientation, a character like Remus Lupin hides in the closet because of his identity as a werewolf, Rubeus Hagrid hides in the closet because of his identity as a half-giant,

ANDREW SLACK is the founder and executive director of the Harry Potter Alliance where he works on innovative ways to mobilize tens of thousands of Harry Potter fans through a vibrant online community. Andrew has also co-written, acted in, and produced online videos that have been viewed more than 7 million times. He has taught theater workshops and served as a youth worker for children and adolescents throughout the US and Northern Ireland. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Brandeis University, Andrew is dedicated to learning and extrapolating how modern myth and new media can transform our lives both personally and collectively.



HENRY JENKINS is the Deflorez Professor of the Humanities and the Director of the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT. He is one of the leaders of the Education Arcade, a major effort to explore the potential educational uses of video games, and the primary architect of the Virtual Screening Room, a digital textbook for teaching film analysis. He is the author or editor of twelve books on various aspects of media and popular culture, including *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, *The Children’s Culture Reader*, *Democracy and New Media*, and *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Intersect*.





and Harry Potter is literally forced to live inside a closet because of his identity as a Wizard. With each of these parallels, we talk to young people about ways that we can all be like Harry, Hermione, Ron and the other members of Dumbledore's Army and work for justice, equality, and for environments where love and understanding are revered.

The average person we reach is somewhere between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five, very passionate, enthusiastic, and idealistic—but often with very few activist outlets that speak to them. And this is no coincidence. Unfortunately, so much of our culture directed at young people is about asking them to consume. It's looking at them as dollar signs, as targets for advertising. *Harry Potter* is a great example of a book that hasn't done that. Of course there's merchandising, but fundamentally the message of the book is empowering for young people.

Young people are depicted in the books as often smarter, more aware of what's happening in the world, than their elders. (Of course, there are some great examples to the contrary where very

wise adults have mentored and supported young people as they have taken action in the world.) These books represent a very empowering tool for young people, who have taken it into their hands—and created Websites and fan fiction, and a whole genre of music called “wizard rock” around *Harry Potter*. And it's been extraordinary. So we are utilizing all of that energy and momentum to make a difference in the world for social activism. We are essentially asking young people the same question that Harry poses to his fellow members of Dumbledore's Army in the fifth movie, “Every great Wizard in history has started off as nothing more than we are now. If they can do it, why not us?” This is a question that we not only pose to our members, we show them how they can start working to be those “great Wizards” that can make a real difference in this world; and whose imprint can have a value that is loving, meaningful, and nothing short of heroic. The enthusiasm we've seen from young people is just astounding.

By translating some of the world's most pressing issues into the framework of *Harry Potter*, we make activism something easier to grasp and less intimidating. Often we show them fun and accessible ways they can take action and express their passion to make the world better by working with one of our partner non-government organizations.

Q J.K. ROWLING USED TO WORK WITH AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. HOW DO YOU THINK THAT BACKGROUND IMPACTED THE BOOKS?

A There are definite parallels between Amnesty's work and the themes in *Harry Potter*. One of these is Amnesty's initiatives for the release of political prisoners.

Harry's godfather, Sirius Black, was a political prisoner. His best friend James Potter and James' wife Lily were murdered and his godson Harry was orphaned. But on top of that trauma, he was ac-

cused of committing the murders. Now if he had had a trial, he could have made a case for why he was innocent and how the real killer was still on the loose. But that couldn't happen because the Ministry of Magic had suspended habeas corpus. This all happened at a time of great terror and in times of great terror, governments often lock people away without a fair trial. We need not look very far for that. It's happening right now in our own country. And not only are many of these prisoners innocent like Sirius, not only are they locked up without trial, they are subsequently tortured—another issue which Amnesty works hard to stop.

In *Harry Potter*, the Wizarding prison known as Azkaban is guarded by Dementors. Dementors suck all the happiness from you, and you live in a state of tortured non-stop panic attack/depression. They literally feed off of the unhappiness in your soul until they suck your soul dry. This is the essence of torture and this is what's been getting done to people in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib and Eastern European prisons that the CIA helped build. People are locked away without a fair trial and then tortured. This is all done under the rationalization that in times of terror, justice must be suspended in the name of freedom.

So these Amnesty themes of political prisoners getting the right to a fair trial and the end of torture are consistent with the *Harry Potter* books and the values of Amnesty International. But JK Rowling in her personal work outside of the books, takes that a step further. This can be seen in her charitable work and advocacy on many fronts, including helping children who are caged in Eastern Europe. Besides this incredible work, there are the words that she speaks outside of the confines of the books and these words help articulate the messages of *Harry Potter*.

Her commencement speech at Harvard in the spring of 2008 was unbelievable. She talked about her experience at Amnesty International as being formative for her imagination. She says, "If you

choose to use your status and influence to raise your voice on behalf of those who have no voice; if you choose to identify not only with the powerful, but with the powerless; if you retain the ability to imagine yourself into the lives of those who do not have your advantages, then it will not only be your proud families who celebrate your existence, but thousands and millions of people whose reality you have helped transform for the better. We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better."

Q WHAT CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR OWN RELATIONSHIP TO THESE BOOKS? HOW WAS THE IDEA OF THE HP ALLIANCE BORN?

A It was when I graduated from college at Brandeis University that I found *Harry Potter*. I had heard of the books but had little interest in them. Upon graduating, I was teaching at a creative theater camp, and I was amazed at the way these children discussed and debated *Harry Potter*—with so much passion. It was insane. I was intimidated by these books. There were four released at the time. The teachers were enthralled by them, and urged me to read them.

I was still resistant. And then I started working in the Boys & Girls Club in Cambridge, and I was working with a completely different socio-economic group of kids—racially and ethnically diverse—yet they, too, were lovers of *Harry Potter*. One of my colleagues was also obsessed with the books. She would read them constantly. I couldn't understand how it could be so great, but finally I asked her to hand me the first book, and she did.

I read that first chapter, and I just started laughing so hard - the first sentence—"Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much." I was surprised. This is a subversive book

that right away begins to indict what I eventually started to call a Muggle Minded attitude—being obsessed with “normalcy,” not being interested in imagination, not being able to see outside of one’s self. So I was swept away, and by the end of that first chapter, I turned to my colleague and said, ‘I think this book just changed my life.’

I raced through those first four books. I read them again and again, and began making personal connections with them. I think when you read a book about a hero, you often become the hero. I would see myself as Harry in specific situations—and issues that I have dealt with in my life. I really connected to her sense of fantasy and imagination—how utterly playful the books are. I was connecting to them from the point of view of how well written they were, how fun they were, and how much they spoke to me on a personal level.

What I call the Dumbledore Doctrine—that, as the band *Harry and the Potters* says, “the greatest weapon we have is love” can actually translate into policy. That is really important. I began thinking, wow, the world needs Dumbledore. Then I read the fifth book, where Harry starts an activist group named Dumbledore’s Army. I began imagining myself going into the Room of Requirement and meeting with young people as if we were part of Dumbledore’s Army—and each of us could be like Harry Potter—could see ourselves in the hero role, not where we’re necessarily the chosen one to bring down all evil, but where each of us plays a valuable part in changing this world, where we are the shapers rather than the spectators of history. I think it’s amazing how we in this country with all of our resources have an opportunity to connect with people all over the world; and to do so in our relationships, through volunteering in our communities, as well as through civic engagement in the political process. That doesn’t mean to engage in a partisan fashion, although people can feel free to do that, but the Harry Potter Alliance doesn’t advocate for anything in a partisan way. However, we do want our young people tutoring underprivi-

leged kids and helping them read locally, but then also challenging the rules of the game that are making it possible for kids to go without food globally. And to challenge our politicians on both sides of the aisle that need to do something about that.

I think a key part of *Harry Potter*’s popularity is that it is an example of a myth that the world is so hungry for, not just that they are funny books or that they’re entertainment or that they’re suspenseful or that they help us escape. They do all those things, but these books open our minds and our hearts to benefiting humanity in a way that I think we all know unconsciously needs to happen. And there’s something truly profound about the love that Dumbledore speaks about and the love that Harry has for his friends that ends up being what defeats Voldemort. And we need that love now. Not in any flaky sense of the word, but in a way that comes from deep within us and that we can share from our hearts.

Q SO YOU’RE USING A LANGUAGE OF PLAY, OF FANTASY, OF HUMOR TO TALK ABOUT POLITICAL CHANGE? MUCH OF THE TIME, POLITICAL LEADERS DEPLOY A MUCH MORE SERIOUS MINDED, POLICY-WONKY LANGUAGE. WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGING THE MYTHS AND METAPHORS WE USE TO TALK ABOUT POLITICAL CHANGE?

A I think it’s so freaking important to break things down for people in a way that they can understand. We get into this wonky-talk. There are so many organizations doing amazing things, and they mobilize their membership really well—but it doesn’t connect to young people. Young people, by and large, care. They care about issues like genocide, poverty, discrimination, and the environment. They want to be engaged in these things, but the people who are going to be inviting them to engage, have to be thinking about “how do I authentically talk from my heart to this young person

in a way that's authentic to their experience and to our shared experience?" One of the reasons why I was successful in beginning the Harry Potter Alliance is that I'm such a hardcore *Harry Potter* fan. Had I not been such a passionate fan, had I not been caring about this myth so much myself, I wouldn't have been able to translate the message as well.

And so it's important, I think, when talking with young people to find out what you have in common, what you're both passionate about, and then to translate that into the real world in a way that makes sense. Activism should be fun. Activism is fun. We had a meeting a couple days ago—a conference call for Stand Fast. We're working with this amazing organization called STAND, which refers to itself as the student arm of the anti-genocide movement. But, and here's where part of the fantasy comes in: we didn't just call it a conference call. We called it a meeting of Dumbledore's Army. You're given a code, press pound, and you're in the Room of Requirement. Just like Harry got up and taught people how to do this, we're going to talk to you about the issues. Everybody was briefed on how to talk about this issue that they are passionate about, and they did it from their own place. It was an amazing experience, but it was done through fantasy.

Q YOU'VE ALREADY STARTED DOWN THIS PATH—SO WHY DON'T YOU SAY A LITTLE MORE ABOUT HOW THE FAN COMMUNITY PROVIDES PART OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SOMETHING LIKE THE HP ALLIANCE?

A Yeah, it couldn't happen without the fan community. When we started, I was blogging about these ideas—about the parallels between discrimination in *Harry Potter* and discrimination based on race or sexuality in our world. Or about political prisoners in *Harry Potter* and political prisoners in our world. About ignoring Voldemort's return, and ignoring the genocide in Darfur in our world.

But no one was reading my blog. Then I met Paul and Joe De George of the wizard rock band *Harry and the Potters*. These are two guys that started a band where they sang from the perspective of Harry Potter. They still do. They loved the idea of a Dumbledore's Army for the real world, and soon enough we began brainstorming ideas and I took my blogs, where I provided action alerts for how people can be like Harry and the members of Dumbledore's Army, and they reposted it on their Myspace page. Their Myspace at the time was going out to about 40 or 50,000 profiles. Now it's going out to about 90,000 Myspace profiles. Soon other musicians began to form bands that were wizard rock—bands based on characters in the book. *Draco and the Malfoys* were the bad guy band. *The Whomping Willows* based off of a tree at Hogwart's. *The Moaning Myrtles*—there are so many of these bands, and they all began to repost together, collectively, the messages that I was writing. Soon, through these wizard rock bands, we were communicating with over 100,000 Myspace profiles, and then the biggest Harry Potter fan sites wanted to be a part of it as well because this is a community that is just so incredibly enthusiastic, idealistic—believes in the values that are in *Harry Potter* about love and social change and the values in Amnesty, and they began to post what we were doing. We have about 3500 people on our e-mail list. We have about 50 chapters. We have about 12,000 Myspace members—about 1500 Facebook members, but we could not have done that without this larger network of wizard rock bands sending it out and of fan sites posting.

In the last year, we've raised well over \$15,000 from small donations to fund the protection of thousands of women in Darfur and villagers in Eastern Burma. In the process we educate young people through podcast interviews with survivors of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, with policy experts, as well as with partnerships with groups like the Genocide Intervention Network and its student arm STAND, the ENOUGH Project, Amnesty International, Aegis Trust and several other human rights organizations.

And now we are building these chapters and we want them to exist in schools and after school programs.

Q AT THE SAME TIME, YOU'VE BEEN ABLE TO BUILD AN ALLIANCE WITH SOME VERY TRADITIONAL POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENTAL LEADERS. COULD YOU SAY A LITTLE BIT ABOUT HOW THEY'VE RESPONDED TO THE HARRY POTTER ALLIANCE APPROACH?

A When I first started calling traditional organizations letting them know that I wanted to help them, I was very afraid that they were going to hang up when I told them the name of the organization is the Harry Potter Alliance. When I tell the organizations at first who we are, I have this initial insecurity about how they're going to react, and at first this proved to be warranted because they didn't know what to do with a group that is named after a fictitious book for young people and plus, we had no track record. Despite some challenges here and there, I must say that I was actually impressed with how open minded some people were. I think the best example of this is the Co-Founder of the ENOUGH Project John Prendergast. John is a policy expert on issues of international crisis and truly is a celebrated activist. But John actively looks for outside of the box ideas. When I met him in 2005 and told him about our new organization, my heart was pounding with nerves and he looked at me very intensely and basically said, "Dude. Comic books turned me into an activist. The least I can do is mention this in the book I'm writing with Cheadle." And that's Don Cheadle who starred in *Hotel Rwanda*. And this was crazy to me. And we are in that book, which was a *New York Times* best seller. It's called *Not On Our Watch: the Mission To End Genocide in Darfur and Beyond* and it's an excellent book.

But now when I call up organizations to form coalitions and partnerships I can tell them that we can get you thousands of people to see what they're doing. This strategy is very important to us: connecting *Harry Potter* fans to non-government organizations that are doing impressive work. We've been in *Time* magazine, on the front cover of *The Chicago Tribune* Business section, and we've been in *The Los Angeles Times*. That sort of helps them take us more seriously now. Sometimes I have to pinch myself that now they're coming to us.

Q WE'VE TALKED ABOUT A NUMBER OF NEW MEDIA PLATFORMS IN ALL OF THIS—BLOGS, PODCASTS, SOCIAL NETWORK SITES, YOUTUBE. HOW IMPORTANT IS THAT INFRASTRUCTURE OF NEW MEDIA TO ENABLING THE KIND OF WORK THAT YOU GUYS ARE DOING?

A Without new media, I don't know what we would be doing. I don't think we would exist. We would be like students at Hogwarts without wands. We would be a club at one or two high schools, which would be fine. It's great to be a club at a high school. But we probably would have a hard time being an organization that has 50 clubs that are really active, which we have right now as far as chapters go, and a message that gets out to 100,000 young people all over. We've got kids in Japan that are working on media reform issues in the United States. New media has provided us with an opportunity where we always say to young people that they have a voice, that their voice matters. The Harry Potter Alliance communicates with over 100,000 young people across the world. None of this could've happened without new media platforms.*

Dear Mr. President

BY GERI ULREY

"Hello Senator McCain. Hello Senator Obama. I am Evan Washington. I am a student at California State University Northridge and a product of a single mother... School prices are way too high. I'm paying \$700 worth in books on top of tuition and I can't get financial aid."



—ONE OF HUNDREDS OF MESSAGES RECORDED THROUGH THE **DEAR MR. PRESIDENT** PROJECT LEADING UP TO THE 2008 NATIONAL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AT CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE.

Dear Mr. President was a public art, video and community building project that I launched over a year ago. I teach film and television at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) and conceived of the project as an attempt to increase civic engagement among young people.



David Quantic

award winning short films, *Pink no.22* and *The Break*, have played extensively on the festival circuit. She earned her MFA in film directing at the UCLA school of Film and Television.

GERI ULREY is a filmmaker and educator living in Los Angeles. She teaches film and television production and editing at California State University, Northridge. Her two

The project was a mobile video booth in the form of a miniature house that visited the CSUN Campus, and a select number of "off campus" locations leading up to the 2008 presidential election. Visitors to the home were invited to record a video message addressed to the next president of the United States. Anyone was welcome to enter the video house and record a message with complete privacy. Over 400 video messages were recorded and posted online at www.dearmr-president08.org. Additionally, each video message has been burned to DVD and sent to President Barack Obama at the White House.

While producing this project, I discovered that people of all ages are hungry to share their thoughts, even if they don't know it at first. The key element to the **Dear Mr. President** project was the notion that we learn more about who we are as we hear ourselves speak. This was liberating for the person speaking their message, even if they were uncomfortable at first. When the video messages were shared with friends and family the listener was brought in and the transformation extended outward. The process impacted the community at large.

I worked with a team of over 50 CSUN students, faculty and staff in realizing this project. This included the Cinema and

Television Arts Department, the Art Department, and the Northridge Public Art Club, mentored by California State University Northridge Professor Kim Abeles. I received partial funding from the Judge Julian Beck Learning-Centered Instructional Grant. **Dear Mr. President** is strictly non-partisan.

We are more powerful as a community when we are all represented and heard. Participants were encouraged to share personal stories, feelings, and thoughts about their lives. Although visitors were encouraged to plan their visit, anyone could have spontaneously discovered the video house, entered it, and recorded a message. The video house moved around the CSUN campus from October 6th through November 6th, 2008. Most participants recorded their messages without knowing the outcome of the election.

Student volunteers helped man the booth and served as videographers, attaining experience in video recording and also gaining real life lessons by working with the public. Students in my digital editing class worked to digitize, color correct, and prepare the videos for uploading on the Internet. The video messages were streamed in their entirety, uncensored.

"Something that I think that you, Mr. President, should do more is talk about the poor and working class. Because never, ever, have I once watched the debate

and you guys talk about the poor class, you always talk about the middle class and truthfully there is no middle



class... so yeah, represent the poor class because that's what class that I represent."

—GABRIANA MYERS,
CSUN FRESHMAN

Despite the media literate times we live in, not all people have access to a video camera and if they do, most people do not have the resources to record a video message and post it online. **Dear Mr. President** circumvented this problem by bringing video and web casting technology directly to the people.

In this past election the latest web based technologies opened up new doors for candidates to reach their constituents, specifically young people. In this climate, the **Dear Mr. President** project resonated for many people as politicians and voters were communicating more and more via the Web.

The language of this project draws much of its vernacular from the MTV confessional style booth that has been popularized by reality shows such as *The Real*

World, Survivor and *Big Brother*. The confessional booth language has become such a part of our culture that when young people entered the video house they felt comfortable without much explanation.

What would you say if you have five, or ten minutes to sit down with the next president?

This is the central question asked of **Dear Mr. President** participants. The question makes you think about what is truly important in your life. What would you want to share with the most powerful leader of our nation?

"Dear Mr. President, my name is Olympia Jewett and I attend Culver City High. I would just like to inform you that my mother



is in the war in Iraq right now and I would like her to come home. She's been there for almost a year now and I need her to come home. It hurts me so."

—OLYMPIA JEWETT,
CULVER CITY HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENT



LEFT: GERI ULREY IN FRONT OF THE VIDEO HOUSE WITH STUDENTS NEARBY. RIGHT: A STUDENT GIVES HIS ADVICE TO THE NEXT PRESIDENT. [Photo credits: Lee Choo; Niku Kashef]

A challenge I faced early on was to create a space that manifested the significance of this question while also making participants feel welcome to speak intimately. The solution was our video house, a comfortable place, a home.

The video house is actually a small utility trailer that I purchased via the online Recycler. It was previously used to haul cement and supplies. However, after weeks of painstaking work we transformed it into a miniature quaint little house. Cool blue painted slats, a red shingled roof, 'grassy' green AstroTurf trim, wallpapered walls, wood paneling, a painted floor, and a cozy chair, all worked to tell us that this was a house after all. This

was not a stark, cold trailer, this was a friendly home where participants were made to feel welcome and to speak candidly about their lives and share their personal experiences.

I believe that a vital component to motivating people to become involved and engaged with the system is to make the political very personal.

"I was born with severe epilepsy and wasn't even supposed to get my high school diploma. Cal State Northridge just accepted me as a high transfer junior

and all of my financial aid was taken away from me... I'm going to have to put CSUN on hold... I was



having daily seizures and deadly seizures and still going to college. community

college, it took me 10 years to accomplish my AA and over 30 years to go legally seizure free."

—JENNIFER WILLIAMS STRIGLE, ACCEPTED AS A JUNIOR TRANSFER AT CSUN

Participants who recorded messages often became deeply emotional. Some commented that they were surprised by the experience as they became choked up, cried, and shared more of themselves than they had intended.

The **Dear Mr. President** project occurred at a critical time for our country, when many people felt vulnerable and in need. For people who recorded messages, the **Dear Mr. President** project served as a release. Having outlets for individuals to express themselves and become personally involved with the political process is gravely needed in our society. I believe that the **Dear Mr. President** project offered just that to the many who participated.

"I'm a marine. . . If you get elected I would supposedly hope that you would eventually take us all out, out of Iraq, and bring everybody home because I know I don't enjoy being there and a lot of my brothers don't... That would be really



nice and also if you could take care of us when we get back as well. Thank you."

—JESSE WILKES, CSUN STUDENT & U.S. MARINE

During this election there were many voters who felt that for the first time their voices and their needs were being addressed. They felt hope that this time they would be heard. Many of the participants conveyed just that in their messages.

But of course there was skepticism.

Many asked, "What will happen with the letters? Will the next president of the US really watch them?"

The question was common. Will public policy be impacted in anyway? This is a good question that I can't give an answer to, yet. I am waiting to see what type of response I receive from the White House. However, the goal of this project was not to change public policy. The goal was to give young people, specifically the students of CSUN, a voice. By making it important and possible for young people to speak out they articulated their minds. This articulation in itself was meaningful and transformative.

Many people who chose not to record messages remarked that they didn't know what to say.

On the one hand, those remarks were disheartening to me and possibly reflect this point in history where critical thinking and thoughtful discourse seems to be losing ground to passive absorption of sound bites. On the other hand, it made me feel that perhaps we were indeed providing a needed community service; maybe we were onto something.

Many participants commented that this was the first time they had ever shared their opinions in a public forum. Many expressed feeling shy and self-conscious, before and after recording. However, most conveyed that they were happy that they had recorded their messages and felt positive about their experience

Dear Mr. President was not just a video booth and website. It was an event. The video house was open for eighteen days, and each time conversations happened between strangers, including the people passing by and those manning the booth. Discussions and debates occurred even with individuals who had no intention of recording a message. The **Dear Mr. President** project successfully created a real world space for conversation in an otherwise commuter campus. Students, faculty, staff, and visitors discussed everything: the economic crisis, health care, the war, the environment, gay marriage, the electoral process and their feelings about voting. The themes of the video letters seeped outside. Individuals discussed and debated issues, they consoled and encouraged each other, and, most importantly, they listened to one another.

Dear Mr. President was, in many ways, democracy in action. Over 400 individuals, students, staff, faculty and residents of Los Angeles recorded video letters. Individuals took the task at hand very seriously, often taking the time to prepare their statements. We created a space that says, here, this is important, come inside, participate in this significant process, speak to the next president. It worked. While watching the videos you can hear it in their voices and see it in their eyes. Most participants were speaking with the dignity and importance of speaking to the President.

"My concerns right now, like most people, are the economy. I've been noticing a lot of smearing and gearing going around in the campaigns these past couple of days. I would appreciate it if you would stick to the issues. If you don't have anything to



say about the issues please do not say anything at all. This is not helping me, this is not helping my family,

this is not helping America. We need to know what you're going to do about this economic crisis. That is what the focus of the debates should be right now... I want to know, what are you going to do for me?"

—PAULA BOUTTE, CSUN MASTER STUDENT

The messages contain not only passionate commentaries on the issues of the day, but heart felt emotional appeals filled with anger, fear, hope and joy. Many directly ask the next president for help in their personal crisis. But, more than anything, the messages reveal a collective urgent and sometime desperate need for a leader to help them help themselves.

"What I'd like to tell you quite frankly is that everything we do in this country, the way we heal the sick, the way we collect food, the way we draw natural resources such as petrol chemical, the way we conduct our foreign affairs, the way we conduct our wars, is simply not sustainable. We cannot keep on doing things the way that we have been doing them. There isn't enough oil. There aren't

enough human beings to fight. Too many people will become sick. And no amount



of tax cuts is going to fix this. In this country we need a serious reassessment of ourselves, what it means to be Americans and what our government does for us."

—ANTHONY YONANO, CSUN STUDENT

As the door opened and they stepped out of the video house, the participants were excited, revved up, relieved. Some even came back to record a second message. For me, the biggest surprise and most moving part of the experience occurred when participants expressed deep genuine gratitude for having been given the opportunity to record the message. Their thankfulness resonated within me on a personal level and I discovered that the **Dear Mr. President** project had a very important place on the CSUN campus.*

Visit www.dearmrresident08.org to watch over 400 video messages recorded as part of the **Dear Mr. President** project.

Students Speak Out.org

A SOCIAL NETWORK FOR YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Combining skilled offline leadership with the power of the social networking platform to engage young citizens in policymaking.

BY KIM FARRIS-BERG & SARAH GRANOFSKY

We spin our wheels in this nation trying to 'make' teens achieve certain social goals, all the while failing to ask teens what might motivate them. We want teens to "get involved" and contribute to the public good, but underestimate them, providing mostly superficial and meaningless civic engagement opportunities. Yet these are the young people who will go on to govern for our democracy and produce for our commonwealth. Psychologist Robert Epstein, at University of California San Diego, in *The Case Against Adolescence* explains our actions and the consequence: Adolescence infantilizes young people. Deny them serious responsibilities, keep them out of real work, give them virtually no contact with adults, tell them they have no function except to be schooled...why would we expect them to be prepared for democratic participation?

In 2007, the Citizens League—a nonpartisan organization building civic imagination and capacity in Minnesota—launched *StudentsSpeakOut.org* (SSO) to demonstrate teens' competency and willingness to participate if given the opportunity to take part in, even lead, public discourse. Teenagers want and have time to participate in public discussions. Yet limited transportation and unavailability from 9-5 prevents them from conventional

participation. Where teens do participate, adults often question their competence or use teens to validate their own theories. With the right tools to understand and influence public process, however, teens could on their own time and from their own homes, schools, or community centers produce authentic, credible and useful information for problem-solving.

Since May 2007, Citizens League has tested, via SSO, whether social networking software like Ning could be manipulated to be a "right tool". In 2007-2008, Minnesota teens worked on SSO to have genuine and unique input on issues like bullying and alternative education programs. They presented their findings at a Minneapolis Public Schools teacher training and to the chair of the education policy committee in the Minnesota House of Representatives. Later, in partnership with the organization *Education|Evolving*, SSO expanded to Milwaukee, where teens are using SSO to provide insights on two issues of their choosing: identifying qualities of effective teachers/teaching and effective disciplinary strategies.

Indeed, there are benefits to using social networking platforms like Ning:

- If well-moderated, social networking spaces allow for discussion of issues, sharing of ideas and development of thought, amidst teens and adults from all kinds of schools and backgrounds who are working collectively and constructively to define problems and solutions.
- Social networking, especially as it happens with Ning's design, is viral: that is one new member can invite multiple new members, and each of those new members may invite multiple new members. In its first two months, Milwaukee SSO had over 100 members. In six months, it had over 400.
- Anyone wishing to involve young people in policy and program design could become a member and ask teens to participate in their work. Mayor of Minneapolis R.T. Rybak joined the Minnesota site to ask teens to inform his Youth Violence Prevention plan.
- With project management, outputs are, to an extent, organized and visible to everyone. *StudentsSpeakOut.org* posts are a constantly developing online public library of teen input on various policy topics.
- Teens want to join. Social networking is familiar to teens, and highly localized online networks are socially appealing. Teens who join for social reasons can be converted to participate in issues-discussions, particularly when they sense adults are listening.

If SSO were merely a place to post and collect ideas, then Ning would be sufficient. But SSO is more than a Web site: it provides a much needed "public space" where people can gather to work out common ground solutions to common problems. This involves a behind-the-scenes, human-led, problem-solving process. Through the process, teens not only provide authentic input, but their thinking about complex issues becomes more so-

phisticated. They learn the value of their personal civic engagement and they experience the process of solving public problems. Those who choose to get more involved develop skills such as: moving from complaining about an issue to doing something about it; gathering input to understand the ideas of like-minded people and potential opposition; building common ground; forming and testing hypotheses; reporting results persuasively, and more.

CITIZING!, A NEW PLATFORM, CHANGES THE DYNAMICS OF "WHO" HAS INFLUENCE IN A DEMOCRACY, ALLOWING TEENS TO BUILD AND RUN PROCESSES THAT PRODUCE INFORMATION, SOMETIMES WITH ADULT COACHING, BUT WITHOUT ADULTS HAVING CONTROL.

Also through the SSO process teens make a difference in their communities. A group that decided to address safety in Minneapolis Public Schools designed and led a two hour teacher training on bullying. Teachers who attended told SSO evaluators that they were surprised that students developed and led the 2-hour module including facilitation of the discussion among the professionals. Yet students were effective in changing the perspective that "skills" are necessary to prevent bullying in the classroom to "relationships" are necessary to prevent bullying in the classroom. The students' presentation also increased teachers' respect



KIM FARRIS-BERG, an independent consultant, is a designer and coordinator of the Students Speak Out initiative for the Citizens League and Education|Evolving.

SARAH GRANOFSKY, SSO ground organizer in Milwaukee, contributed quotes from the Milwaukee students.





A SCENE FROM A RECENT SSO MEETING.

for the possibilities for an electronic forum such as *Students Speak Out*. This was important to the Citizens League in its evaluation of SSO, since the idea of young people using electronic forums for public input had not been well-received in all school environments for fear teens would complain too much about issues they don't understand or that they would spread "hate" messages about particular teachers or schools.

ON SSO, STUDENTS LEARN THE VALUE OF THEIR PERSONAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND THEY EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS OF SOLVING PUBLIC PROBLEMS.

The Citizens League has found that Ning, which is built for socializing, works well for some aspects of the process, such as gathering and reporting information. But since Ning lacks a project-management component, much of the process-learning takes place off of Ning on email, telephone, and in personal meetings. Small teams of student leaders work with adults who have significant experience

in process design and management, the ability to work well with teens in the driver's seat, can "listen" for themes and insights and which might be helpful to identifying solutions, and who are comfortable with social networking software. People with this mix of talents are scarce, however. So the Citizens League considered how to put the process more in teens' hands in order to decrease the potential for adults to impose their own ideas and to increase the opportunity for new, genuine information to emerge from larger numbers of teenagers.

In 2009, the Citizens League will beta test its solution—*CitiZing!*. *CitiZing!* will be the first-ever civic networking platform, drawing on the principles of social networking and project management platforms to bring together stakeholders in public problems to work collectively to find solutions. *CitiZing!* puts teens (indeed all citizens!) in the position to manage civic discourse processes by removing the mystery of "good" process design. Users customize a process in which they'll work with other users to frame a public problem, co-create solutions, and identify ways to influence public policy and practice. Throughout the process,

CitiZing! tools empower users with information that will allow them to learn and accomplish tasks that will bolster their potential impact. Tools will help users involve key stakeholders and experts, use existing research, freely exchange information, and encourage transparency, for example. *CitiZing!* employs familiar models—surveys, forums, wikis, to-do lists, schedulers, and graphs—but each with its own “civic twist,” such as a wiki that has templates and screencast walkthroughs for drafting legislation. Also, a drag-and-drop “stakeholder map” of school bureaucracy structure.

CitiZing! will give teens the tools (literally) to address public problems on the basis of their competency and willingness to participate, not on age, location and previous understanding of “good process”. The software is designed to change the dynamics of “who” has influence in a democracy, allowing teens to build and run processes that produce information, sometimes with adult coaching, but without adults having control. The information will be useful to anyone designing policy solutions that require teens to behave in different ways.

Are students learning about democratic engagement and civics from Citizens League’s hybrid of process and technology?

The students involved say that investigating public problems using SSO helped them learn about policymakers’ influence on public problems, and that their input matters. They also found that they can influence others’ (e.g. teachers’) behaviors in a positive way simply by letting them know they’re paying attention and taking it upon themselves to find ways to improve their schooling. Students found common ground with other students. Understanding others’ experiences helped them to better define their environment, and made their own troubles seem less harrowing. Understanding their own power, students developed skills

that they went on to try out in other settings, such as public speaking, setting goals and going about achieving them, and leadership.

Gathering evidence about quality teaching using *Students Speak Out* in Milwaukee, Bianca Williams said, “I have all of the advisors [teachers] on their feet wondering when I am going to come and interview them. It’s pretty fun to know that the advisors at my school are really paying attention to what they do and what they say, because they know I will be bringing it to their attention pretty soon. Thanks to SSO, I now feel confident in what I am doing.” Ashlee Bishop also of Milwaukee, WI says, “I think it is important that the students offer their opinions and insights because we are the main ones the educational policies are going to affect...The rules and guidelines the policymakers set forth are going to determine what we learn, how we learn, and where we learn.”

Shane Saunders of Brooklyn Park, MN, said, “I learned that [being an active] citizen is, for one, a lot of fun. It makes you feel really good about yourself and makes you feel responsible and appreciated. [My peers now] say I’m insightful. I’m more organized for myself.” Ashley Iverson of Spring Lake Park, MN reported, “I learned a lot about myself. Hearing other peoples’ stories, I realized mine wasn’t so bad. This year at my graduation I got up and spoke in from of all my teachers and 150 more—something I thought I would never do. *Students Speak Out* has helped me open up. I am happy I did, ‘cause it was one of the best things.”*

Check out Students Speak Out, on Ning, for yourself:
 Minnesota – www.StudentsSpeakOut.org
 Milwaukee – www.Milwaukee.StudentsSpeakOut.org



BIANCA



ASHLEE



SHANE



ASHLEY

Bro-Friending and Bro-Longing

MEDIA CODES FOR ENGAGING GUYS

BY PAUL BAINES

For the past 5 years I've been doing media education work around the theme of masculinity. I work for a small alternative media non-profit doing workshops for youth in Toronto. Out of all the workshops I offer, one called "Who's the Man? looking at pop culture and masculinity" is the most requested by teachers and youth workers and the most rewarding one for me to facilitate and reflect on.

The best part of my job is going to youth conferences promoting social justice and ecological sustainability. My workshops are one small part of larger programs for education and action and it's inspiring to participate in the diversity of projects and feel the positive energies for change.

As an educator concerned with youth voices and choices, I've noticed two trends. First, females do most of the attending, organizing, and workshop facilitation. Secondly, the minority of guys who do attend these conferences don't attend my workshop as much as their female peers do.

I recently joked about renaming my workshop from "Who's the Man?" to "Where's the Man?" because of this lack of male engagement.

I care about this work because I think males (myself included) need to be more engaged with their personal and social lives. Too often guys think gen-

der issues are about women's lives and talk of male privilege commonly speaks of entitlement and silences men's pain within patriarchy. According to gender studies professor Michael Kimmel, manhood and masculinity are in a "perilous" condition as guys wrestle with the traditional gender norms of being the provider, the protector, and the problem solver.

In *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* Kimmel investigates young men's lives through interviews, research, and close cultural observation. He leads workshops at colleges and high schools and asks guys what "Be a Man" means. He summarizes a "Top Ten" list for us:

1. "Boys Don't Cry"
2. "It's Better to be Mad than Sad"
3. "Don't Get Mad – Get Even"
4. "Take It Like a Man"
5. "He Who has the Most Toys When he Dies, Wins"
6. "Just Do It" or "Ride or Die"
7. "Size Matters"
8. "I Don't Stop to Ask for Directions"
9. "Nice Guys Finish Last"
10. "It's All Good" (p. 45)

Kimmel's 'Guy Code' (or psychologist William Pollack's 'Boy Code') is wired into most North American media. I try to encourage students, es-

pecially guys, to think about the Code and its impacts when gaming, watching movies, TV shows, and ads or listening to talk/sports/music radio shows. Educators can consider a broad range of questions to shape a discussion or lesson plan. For example, try some content analysis strategies and observe this Code in action by asking:

- What media texts are popular with your male students and how does that content (relationships, story, characters, language, assumptions, etc.) support, modify, question, or reject the Code?
- How much variety is there when representing masculinity and what it means to be a good guy or bad guy?
- Do certain media forms (music, television, movies, games, comics) or genres (sports, comedy, news, drama, action, animation, documentary) offer more variety?
- How do sexuality, race, and class (independently and interdependently) shape masculinity?
- How is the Code shaped by the commercial system of media production and consumption?

In my workshops I ask guys to cut up magazines and make collages to answer the question “what does masculinity look like?” and we find similar conclusions about the Guy Code. Jackson Katz’s videos *Wrestling with Manhood* and *Tough Guise* also use mass media to decode and reflect on how masculinity and manhood are being constructed. With these examples, or ones generated in your classroom, guys can engage with media representations of the Guy Code and indirectly (yet strategically) connect with their gender performances and feelings of empowerment. I like to use media awareness as a tool for self awareness. We can ask:

- What is missing from this Code?
- How have stories of manhood changed over the past 50 years?

- What is a man’s success or happiness based on?
- Do the representations of manhood cut men off from their emotions?
- What emotions are acceptable for guys?
- Do men and women respond differently to the Code and if so, in what ways?
- How is conflict usually resolved?
- Is it possible to always be in control?
- What happens if guys are afraid, confused, uncertain, or not in control?
- What does questioning masculinity look, sound, and move like?

I look at the work of Kimmel, Pollack, Katz and others and conclude that the Guy Code jams men’s ability and interest to be active in social movements and their own development as caring and active adults. Not only is the Code a script for detachment and loneliness, but it even restricts the ability to admit what has been lost. Like consumerism, the Guy Code bulks itself up bigger than life because in the end it doesn’t nourish or sustain men’s needs. Norah Vincent, author of *Self-Made Man* writes, “Every man’s armour is borrowed and 10 sizes too big and beneath it, he’s naked and insecure and hoping you won’t see” (Kimmel, p. 43).

No one is suggesting that most guys are blindly accepting this Code. Research and testimonials show that the Code is only getting stronger within a context of crisis and confusion. The Guy Code is a rebellion and adaptation in a time when men’s roles, rights, and rituals are unclear. Guys are retreating further into “Guyland” because it offers a

PAUL BAINES does media empowerment workshops in Toronto for GlobalAware Independent Media. He is a media generalist labouring in media production, advocacy, education, research, and dreaming. His website is: www.mediaindful.ca. Paul is currently coordinating a new blog on media and masculinity that he hopes will one day become a magazine. The blogsite started February 2009: www.mascmag.com



safe space that asks no questions and gives simple answers. Yet, these answers are at odds with being a healthy human being with a range of relational and emotional needs. Plus, it's easier to pretend "It's All Good" rather than asking for help. In *Guyland*, Kimmel writes "if men have a difficult time asking for directions when they are lost driving cars, imagine what it feels like to feel lost and adrift on the highway of life (42).

Reading and re-reading media texts open a dialogue with guys. Each text is an opportunity to listen and name what is going on and uncover what's missing. But what are guys asking for? What direction do they want to go in?

THE GUY CODE JAMS MEN'S ABILITY AND INTEREST TO BE ACTIVE IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT AS CARING AND ACTIVE ADULTS.

MTV's new reality show *BroMance* is a timely media text. The set up is simple. Hollywood-heart-throb, Brody Jenner has an opening for a new male buddy to share his playboy lifestyle with. Nine guys from across the country compete to prove their 'bro-commitment' in various 'bro-mantic' ways. MTV and Brody have taken a risky step constructing reality about straight men's close relationships with other straight men. Also, *I Love You, Man* follows a straight man's quest to find a Best Man before his wedding day. The main character has sadly never been skilled at building close male relationships. With the support of his fiancée and a "Just-Do-It" attitude his man-date experiences explore why men come together, or stay apart.

These are just two examples exploring male needs and relationships not typical in popular culture. Men in *BroMance* and *I Love You, Man* are openly seeking close male friendships and prompting us toward an important area of Guyland and the Guy

Code. We can open up these texts just as we did above and design critical and creative responses. We can approach male friendships, real and mediated, as road maps for what guys really care about.

How do we engage guys more? We need to make it cool to care and we can start with "bro-friends". Male friendships based on honesty, vulnerability, respect, integrity, trust, and equality can connect men's inner and outer worlds. This type of belonging, (rather than relations of fear, dominance, and escapism) can nurture self-respect and the courage to accept strength as well as weakness. Male "bro-mances" (or how about "bro-longing") can also build a guy's emotional literacy and the capacity to feel the beauty and tragedy in the world and how we are all connected. Friendships bring out the best and worst in us, but what makes them special is a base of commitment and being accepted for who you are.

So much of Guyland's media environment is full of dangerous and deadbeat guys that any alternative should be celebrated and better yet, started. Educators can question media texts on manhood and stay curious about the types of needs being communicated. Media examples and experiences of male friendship can give guys greater permission to care about others, connect with their own emotional lives, and relate to a world in need of some major repairs.*

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YOUTH MEDIA CAFÉ

CONNECTS CALIFORNIA AND WISCONSIN...

Online!

On Friday, November 7th, 2008, students, educators, and media activists from Santa Monica, California and Milwaukee, Wisconsin met online using Skype. High school students from several Milwaukee area high schools and college students from Santa Monica College worked together to explore the role new media plays in transforming learning and civic engagement.

Nick Pernisco hosted the group at Santa Monica College with his students presenting their understanding of media literacy issues and talking about the value of blogging in class. Geri Ulrey, professor at California State University, Northridge shared her video booth project "Dear Mr. President."



Karen Ambrosch and Kate Vannoy hosted the group at Audubon Technology and Communication Center in Milwaukee. Audubon students talked about their use of online learning while in the first year of their new small public charter school. Students involved in a newly formed Milwaukee Students Speak Out group shared their use of a NING site to organize students as a political force in local education issues.



Everyone involved was energized by the exchange of ideas and the exciting work that was being done at each site. The high school students benefited from listening to what the college students had to share and the adults involved were impressed with the profound insights and questions of the high school students. The Media Café proved that moving beyond the walls of the classroom and giving students a voice in their own education is vital to truly engaging them in the larger global community.

The National Telemedia Council and *The Journal of Media Literacy* are committed to collaboratively creating more of these Media Cafés to bring the ideas of the journal to life and to continue the work of creating a global, media-literate society.*



Youth Media Café Makes a Connection
Broadcast professor Nick Pernisco hosts the incisive lecture to promote media literacy and its global effects on society.

By Nicholas M. Greenberg
Understanding how media affects our lives is not a luxury, it's a necessity. In a world where information is spread so quickly and so widely, it's essential to know how to navigate the media landscape. This is the mission of the Youth Media Café, a project that brings together students and educators from California and Wisconsin to explore the role of new media in our lives. The project is a collaboration between the National Telemedia Council and the Journal of Media Literacy. It's a chance for students to share their experiences and insights with each other and with the broader community. The project is also a chance for educators to learn from the students and to share their own experiences. The project is a testament to the power of media literacy and to the importance of staying informed in our digital age.

Media Literacy as Timeless Learning

ON THE PATH TO HOLISTIC MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION

BY CARLY STASKO

AT AGE SIXTEEN I MADE MY FIRST ZINE. I DID IT BECAUSE IT SEEMED FUN, DIFFERENT AND A LITTLE MISCHIEVOUS. IT WASN'T AS IF I HAD SAT DOWN AND SAID, "HMMMM, SEEMS LIKE THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MEDIA IS DOING A REAL NUMBER ON MY SELF-CONFIDENCE. I KNOW! I'LL RECONTEXTUALIZE THOSE IMAGES AND AFFIRM MY PERSONAL WORLD VIEW IN A ZINE!" THAT LEVEL OF DECONSTRUCTION WOULD HAVE TO WAIT FOR LATER.

—Carly Stasko, author of *Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms*

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I describe key personal and professional experiences which led me to develop a Holistic Approach to Critical and Creative Media Literacy education. It is a first attempt to outline just how universally applicable media literacy is, and just how instrumental it proved to be for my own survival. In fact, it helped save my life.



This short paper is an introduction rather than a conclusion because I am very much at the beginning of a new journey, still healing and finding a new identity in a changing media landscape. I hope it is an important original contribution to developing a new framework for key strategies that extend media literacy by revealing its truly universal aspirations and applications. But of course my hope is not only academic. I hope others will find the ways and means to transform media literacy in order to connect with their own most pressing challenges. I hope you will look for areas of your own empowerment and draw from them in your own teaching. While one of the primary goals of media literacy is to encourage student empowerment, sometimes it's also important—though uncomfortable—to look for our own areas of empowerment and healing as educators, so that we can find our own voices. I will for now begin what I envision here as a larger project that I will continue to pursue by sharing my story—a story about my mind, my media, my environment and my body.

THE SHIFT

All my life I had one way of explaining my attraction to media literacy, and this story has defined (even confined) my identity. As a teenager I found that media literacy helped me empower myself. But something happened a few years ago that disrupted that story. It didn't invalidate it, but rather cast my own personal narrative in a new light. In fact, it dramatically changed my relationship with media itself. I want to share with you my story of learning as well as a call to action.

I was first drawn to media literacy through Toronto-based 'zine publishing and culture jamming, driven by my own need for self-expression and civic engagement. I was a young "turbo chick" feminist, a 'zinester, and a culture jammer (Stasko, 2001). Culture jamming is the creative and subversive act of 'detournement', when media activists remix the language of advertising to challenge the consumer ideals and stereotypes presented in mass media in order to present an alternative narrative. Culture jamming can involve climbing up on billboards and changing their text, to creating tailored stickers to alter the message of bus-shelter ads – in all circumstances the act is playful, critical and humorous and yet addresses serious issues. As a young culture jammer I wanted to present an alternative vision to the stereotypes and images in advertising, and to reclaim the public space in my environment which had become dominated by commercial rather than community messages.

Later, I founded the Youth Media Literacy Project (YMLP) through which I have visited numerous schools, campuses and community centers across North America and contributed to the development of innovative curriculum and course work material. I have led workshops on 'zine making, street art and social change, subvertising and media deconstruction, student activism and globalization.

Through my earlier experimentation with DIY media production and subversive media jamming,



ranging from billboard liberation to public interventionist theatre, I learned to engage with media through a form of empowering play. This profoundly impacted how I view media literacy and pedagogy. I see play and process at the core of media literacy learning because the media context is continually shifting and students are most empowered by skills that can help them engage with media in an adaptive manner. I often returned to the metaphor of jamming and the three meanings of jam: jamming the machinery, jamming as a form of improvisation, and jamming as a way of preserving sweet things. Similarly I saw media literacy in action as a means of challenging mechanizations of authority and oppression, improvising with symbolic

CARLY STASKO is a self-titled Imagitator – one who agitates imagination. She is also an artist, activist, educator, writer, radio/television producer, and creative healer. As founder and director of the Youth Media Literacy Project for over a decade, she has visited various high schools, universities and community centres across North America, leading creative and empowering workshops in association with school boards and non-profits including UNESCO. She is featured in the award winning documentaries *Culturejam* and *Fierce Light: When Spirit Meets Action* as well as in the international best-selling book *NO LOGO* by Naomi Klein.

Currently Carly is completing her Masters Thesis at OISE/UT in Toronto where her research has focused on Holistic Approaches to Media Literacy Education.





creativity, and finally, as a means for students to make themselves heard through the creation of a new culture, new narratives and new interpretations resulting from critical and creative engagement.

Little did I know how such skills would continue to help me in challenges that lay ahead for me. These skills originally developed to empower myself and subsequently my students, later helped save my life. The method (jamming) didn't change, but the medium did. First I jammed billboards, and then I jammed my own body. I discovered the ME in MEdia.

JAMMING CANCER

A few years ago I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a form of cancer that often affects young people, and which fortunately has a very high success rate from treatment. It was while in the hospital in the early weeks of my healing journey that my then colleague (and now fiancé) told me that I had to try to culture jam cancer. He said, "There's got to be a way you can jam this Carly. If anyone can figure out how to culture jam cancer Carly, it's you." Shortly after the diagnosis I was undergoing tests in the hospital, and happened upon a story in *Bust* magazine about Indy-artist

and filmmaker Miranda July. The article discussed her projects titled "Learning to Love You More" both a "web site and series of non-web presentations comprised of work made by the general public in response to assignments that are posted online" (July, 2006). Among the examples of assignments listed in this brief article, one particularly stuck out. It read, "Heal Yourself". That was the first time that I imagined that healing myself could be a form of art or creative expression—and yet it made perfect sense!

That night I raided the supply room and used hospital tape and scissors to make collages out of the magazines from the waiting room. This time I gave all the models bald heads, as if they had recently received Chemotherapy. Cutting and pasting magazines from hospital waiting rooms, I created a 'zine to leave in the hospital for other patients and their families to see. This 'zine was a place to experiment with new realities I was trying to contend with. It was also a place for me to express myself and connect with other young cancer patients facing the same challenges. As I played with the images I felt the familiar shifting of power. While in the hospital I also began making personalized healing music with my own lyrics and remixing recorded samples from the hospital, most significantly the sound of a big bell mounted on the wall of the Princess Margaret Hospital chemotherapy unit which is reserved for ringing upon the completion of one's final chemo treatment. I still dance to this triumphant song with the ringing bell loop playing over a vibrant hip-hop rhythm. Instead of simply reacting in fear to what was happening, I felt stronger. I felt like an artist, integrating and adapting to the challenges of the medium. This time the medium was me.

In the spirit of critical creativity, I analyzed and deconstructed the military metaphors my doctors used about cancer treatments, and then created new metaphors that suited me better. I began to visualize my immune system like a well-run and

loving community, where everything is recycled and sustainable. I knew from my media literacy background that there were a myriad of ways to tell the same story, and so I felt empowered to take on a more powerful role in telling my own story. I would not use the word “mine” to describe “the” cancer – it was just passing through. Eventually my family, friends and doctors began to adopt this new paradigm too! I felt remarkably encouraged as I deconstructed the language about health and disease, using all my creative abilities to jam the situation. I took this re-conceptualizing of medical metaphors and narrative to a new level when I embodied my image of the white blood cell/civic leader. I dressed up like a white blood cell and acted out new empowering narratives about healing based on the science of hematology and immunology, inspired by my own imagination and guided by my felt sense of the healing in my body. My friend dressed up as “Friendorphines” (healing endorphins inspired by friendship) and my then boyfriend (now fiancé) dressed up as “Love”, both of them supporting characters in this great drama taking place inside my body. Talk about Do-It-Yourself media!

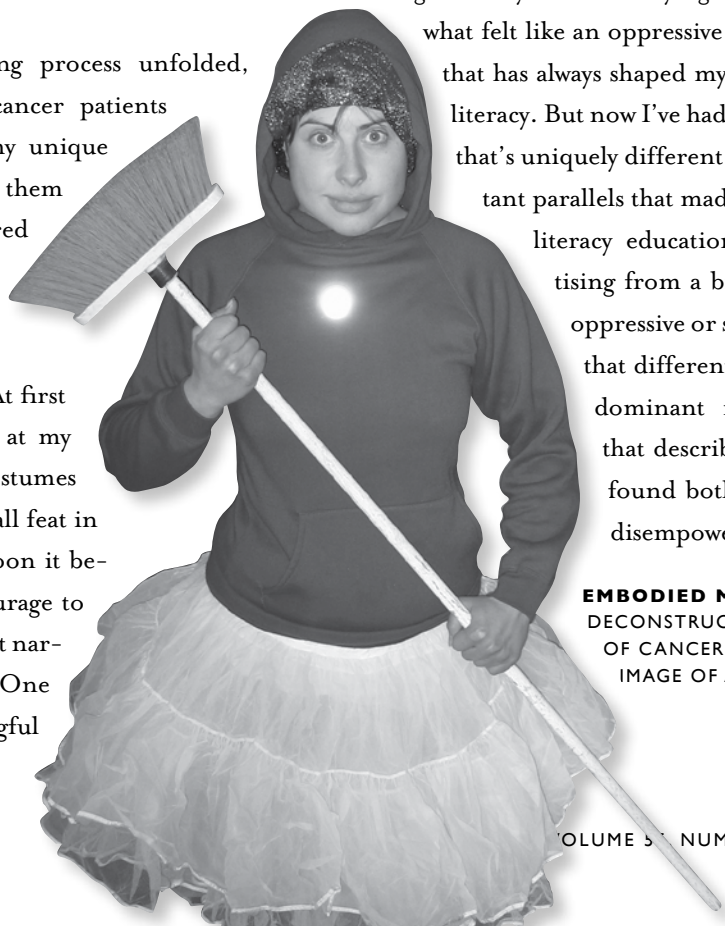
As my creative healing process unfolded, many of my fellow cancer patients took strength from my unique approach. Many of them had never considered an alternative option to submitting to the dominant narratives of western medicine. At first they would just laugh at my songs, collages and costumes (laughter being no small feat in a cancer ward!), but soon it became clear that my courage to challenge the dominant narratives could spread. One of my most meaningful

experiences happened when I brought my suitcase of costumes to a meeting of over 30 young adult cancer patients like myself. I led a workshop on finding your inner super-healer in which we all dressed up like our own super heroes, reclaiming our symptoms as strengths (ex: “Introducing Hot Flash! and The Bald Eagle!”), often embodying our own immune-systems together as we celebrated our strengths and courage together.

Too often we receive messages from consumer culture that discourage the imagination, instead promising us power through choosing and buying. We are surrounded by images of fetishized products and bodies which try to define our hopes *for* us. However, the creative power has always been ours; everyone can be the artist of their imagination. We don’t need to buy empowerment, we can grow our own!

I’ve begun to see my exploration of media activism as a healing journey, one in which I engaged fully with my environment by using my imagination and creative energy to shift relationships and power. My original story was one of trying to empower myself in what felt like an oppressive media context, and that has always shaped my approach to media literacy. But now I’ve had another experience that’s uniquely different but also has important parallels that made me rethink media literacy education. Jamming advertising from a billboard that has an oppressive or sexist message wasn’t that different from jamming the dominant military metaphors that describe cancer, because I found both to be limited and disempowering.

EMBODIED MEDIA LITERACY. STASKO DECONSTRUCTS THE MILITARY METAPHORS OF CANCER AND DRESSES UP AS HER IMAGE OF A WHITE BLOOD CELL.





In both cases I had to improvise with what was there, to have the courage to subvert a dominant narrative, and the creativity to generate a new narrative in which I had voice and could feel engaged in a meaningful and empowered way. This reinvigorated my passion for media literacy education because it showed me that processes learned in one context can be applied in unanticipated future ways. I have come to

see media literacy as a key adaptive skill in our rapidly changing culture and environment. That's why I've come to see the importance of bringing holistic pedagogical practices which focus more on transformation, process, timeless learning and meaning construction to media literacy education.

WIDER LESSON/IMPLICATIONS

I didn't find media literacy in the classroom; I found it in the streets, with my media activist peers. It took visionary teachers like Barry Duncan (known as the father of media literacy in Canada) and other members of the AML (The Association for Media Literacy) to see how, for example, culture jamming could connect to media literacy education – it was they who first brought me into the classroom (a medium I was excited to jam as well). We need to carry on that tradition of recognizing the learning when it's happening.

It is important to think about how to distill the critical process into adaptive strategies for voice and empowerment, and to notice unexpected areas of application by broadening our notion of what media literacy is. This will also help us to see the value of media literacy in our ever-changing global society, because in addition to an ability to navigate advertising and logos, it is a skill necessary for navigating life itself.

Whereas I originally used media literacy to challenge consumer culture and transform my environment and identity, my project has taken on larger ambitions: my own broadening applications have led me to transform my understanding media literacy itself. It wasn't simply that I *applied* media literacy. My own understanding of it was permanently transformed and expanded in the process. I can't go back to my old ways of engaging in media literacy. I am in a new place, and need to recreate new ways. At times the old me and the old ways of engaging in media literacy seems limited and nar-

row, but I see them as a good starting point. The point is to continually grow and unfold.

We all have a survival instinct that has evolved over thousands of years. In a time when our culture and environment is changing more rapidly than ever and we encounter more information and stimulation than any generation prior to us, it is in culture and education that evolutionary leaps can happen to help us adapt and survive—even as what counts as ‘survival’ is changing.

Everyday we encounter power, expressed in the form of symbolic meaning making. If we expand the notion of media literacy to include a more holistic interpretation of both ‘media’ and ‘literacy’ then we can develop a new approach which can empower students, teachers, families and citizens in learning how to be actively enfranchised when encountering such power.

There is a heated debate about whether education is about preparation for work or for citizenship. Within the media literacy field the question is whether to develop connoisseurship about media or a more critical analysis of media messages. While I am fully immersed in those debates myself, by reflecting on my own personal experiences of survival and empowerment I see that media literacy education is about preparing us for unknown future challenges. To that end it has to be open-ended and inclusive. This holistic approach is very likely happening in many classrooms, but it might be happening outside of the curriculum or stated intent, perhaps emerging out of the very human needs for empowerment and voice. As educators it’s essential for us to recognize this importance. Much of what students have to learn is already in them and the teachers’ task is to draw it out. We have to help our students discover their own survival instinct and what that means within our modern media context. The aim is that they not only survive, but also *thrive*. Something media literacy educators may notice is

the distinctive times when students have used lessons and concepts in personally empowering ways. Rather than simply reproducing knowledge for class they are tapping into their own wisdom as to transform themselves and the world.

Students of media literacy continue to emerge throughout their lives. Yet media literacy itself is emergent. There are media everywhere, and in all of these contexts there is an implicit or explicit authority. The true purpose of media literacy is the ability to interpret, challenge and transform those meanings. I’ve had my own transformative experiences as a result of media literacy education, and in turn some of these experiences have led me to transform my vision of what media literacy can be. My old way of doing media literacy is like old shoes that no longer fit. I have a transformed vision of what media literacy is, rooted in my own experience.

CONCLUSION

One of the tenets of media literacy is that all media are a construct, and hence we can construct and deconstruct them. It was an empowering moment when I realized that the metaphors doctors used



to describe me were just that—metaphors, rather than absolute truth. Since they were also constructs I could deconstruct them just the same way I learned to deconstruct advertising. I now see that the process isn't that different, though the context and medium were.

One of the best guides in developing a holistic approach to media literacy education is to consider the ways in which media literacy is applied holistically in divergent and interdisciplinary fields. Not only is it something that can be learned holistically, but is something that can be *applied* holistically. It was an awakening for me to realize this.

I creatively reinterpreted and extended the meaning and use of media literacy to help me deal with cancer, but this also permanently transformed my old way of thinking about media literacy itself.

It gave me a new vision of what media literacy could be. I've been taking time while I heal to reflect on that more, and now I feel poised to test it out in the classroom and see just what that new kind of media literacy looks like.

All good work must come from a personal place within, and media literacy is no exception. So I invite you to consider and notice where media literacy is happening outside the lines, beyond curricular expectations. The drive for self-expression and empowerment is strong and apparent all around us. I invite you to practice noticing it in yourself and in your students.*

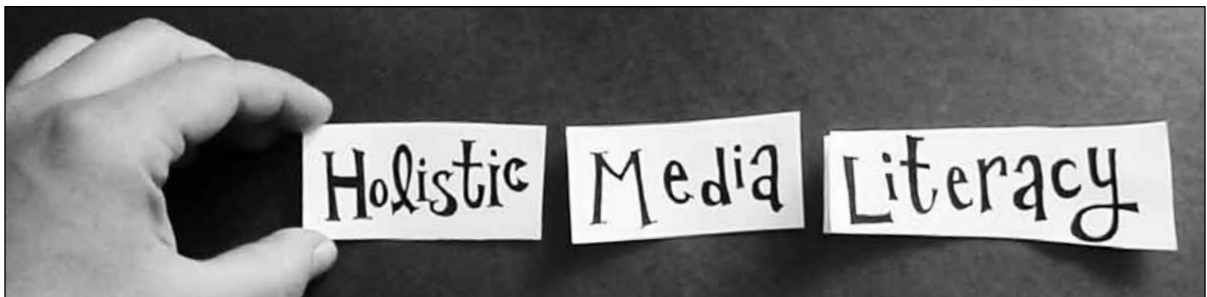
ASSIGNMENT

Write a journal entry about three different times when you challenged authority to define an aspect of yourself, your life, your environment and/or worldview. Feel free to include drawings, images, newspaper or magazine clippings, song lyrics, or any other creative technique or source. Reflect on the experience and consider the following questions:

- What was my motivation?
- What unique challenges did I face?
- How is/isn't my story reflected in mass media and why?
- What knowledge base and experience did I draw from?
- How did this process transform my understandings of myself, of media, of literacy?
- How would I integrate lessons learned from these experiences into my approach to teaching?

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Resources for Further Reading

PUBLISHED ESSAYS ON MEDIA EDUCATION AND
YOUTH VOICES SELECTED BY **BARRY DUNCAN**

POPULAR MEDIA, CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND INNER CITY YOUTH

BY DIANE WISHART LEARD
& BRETT LASHUA

Canadian Journal of Education
29, 1 (2006): 244-264

In this article, we explored ways youth, traditionally silenced, engaged with popular culture to voice experiences and challenges dominant narratives of public schools and daily lives. We also considered how educators use popular culture as critical pedagogy with inner city youth. Through ethnographic bricolage and case study methods, and drawing from cultural studies and critical pedagogy, we have presented two case studies. One study highlighted how a school used popular theatre and critical literacy to connect with students' experiences. The second focused on narratives in students' rap songs. These case studies highlight the risks, challenges, and potential for building respectful and reciprocal relationships with students.

YOUNG WOMEN NEGOTIATE, RESIST MEDIA IMAGES

BY NICOLE BAUTE

Our Schools, Ourselves
CCPA 410-75 Alberta, Ottawa, On K1P5E7.

The cultural ideal for women is younger, thinner, richer and sexier than ever before. The situation for young women is dire: What options do they have for positive role models who will help them see through this barrage of negative images?

A series of interviews with regular Canadian teenagers gave me some hope. These young women seem to have the tools to think critically about the images they consume. Even if their consumer habits are influenced by marketing and entertainment, their values and dreams are reflected in everyday heroes like mothers and grandmothers, and some alternative celebrity role models.

SPRINGING UP A REVOLUTION: MEDIA EDUCATION STRATEGIES FOR TWEENS

BY SALINA ABJI

*Re-thinking Media Education: Critical
Pedagogy and Identity Politics*
Hampton Press, 2007

...Not only do contemporary media education strategies underestimate girls' abilities to read and critically analyze media messages, they also overestimate the power of "critical viewing" alone as a strategy for empowering girls. Furthermore, emphasis on consumer-based activism does little to address the problematic corporate practices behind ads, or the everyday experiences of tweens living in an increasingly branded world. MediaWatch's findings therefore challenge feminist theorists, activists, and media educators to develop new strategies for resistance and resiliency – strategies that incorporate, rather than alienate, the opinions and experiences of girls.

SCHOOL OF (PUNK) ROCK: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RANT ON EDUCATION

BY ANTONIO LÓPEZ

Media Literacy, A Reader

Peter Lang, 2007

Whenever I begin a media education project with teenagers, I start by saying that everything I learned about media I learned in the school of punk rock. ...I teach them to be rebels, which is contrary to what the education system encourages. ...In a workshop in Brooklyn, I asked a group of African-American youths if they knew of any artists who had politically or socially conscious lyrics. None had. Then I showed them Public Enemy's *Fight the Power* video shot by Spike Lee; they were speechless. It was as if aliens had entered the room and seized their brains. However, I'd seen this look before; I knew it meant they were absorbing something meaningful. Rebellion was getting under their skin, and in the school of punk rock, that's what it's all about.

BAD BOYS: ABSTRACTIONS OF DIFFERENCE AND THE POLITICS OF YOUTH 'DEVIANC'

BY TODD R. RAMLOW

Youthscapes

Ed. Maira, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005

As in common homophobic discourse, the object of devaluation and intolerance in discourses of

disability is seemingly erased in the phobic utterance. Phrases like "That's so gay" and "That's retarded" are used colloquially to indicate that an object or event is senseless or silly. These speech acts become so routinely abstracted that those who perform and witness them lose sight of the real gay and disabled people whose very lives are overcoded with negative social and individual value by such idiomatic usage.

...The crises of youth deviance that I examine here, and that are expressed in the debates about Eminem, in the wake of the shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and in popular culture in *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) and *Kids* (1995), circulate metaphors of disability and queerness to manage the "threat" of a non-normative heterosexual masculinity that is tied to questions of racial and class mobility.

FRAME WORK: HELPING YOUTH COUNTER THEIR MISP REPRESENTATIONS IN MEDIA

BY DEIRDRE M. KELLY

Canadian Journal of Education

29, 1 (2006): 27-48

Drawing on several ethnographies with youth participants, I identified and critiqued three frames that help to comprise the mainstream media's larger framework of

troubled and troubling youth: inner-city youths as "gang bangers"; teen mothers as "children having children" and "welfare bums"; and girls as fashion obsessed and impressionable. I considered the relationship between news coverage of youth and educational programs and curriculum and explored the possibilities and limits of various strategies aimed at producing and circulating diverse youth self-representations in the mainstream and alternative media, including involving youth as co-researchers.

STUDENTS' CHALLENGES TO CRITICAL PEDAGOGICAL THINKING

BY SARA BRAGG

Re-thinking Media Education

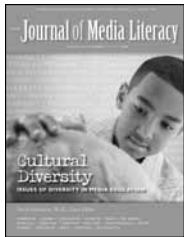
Hampton Press, 2007

To develop "postmodern pedagogies" that might respect the specificity and context-dependence of meaning, perhaps we should begin to consider how we could work with these students' every day poetics of association, relation, comparison, and substitution, rather than through critical pedagogy's abstract logic, revelation, rules and application of a language the teacher supplies. There is an issue of social justice here, a demand to know what a text means and why they may exclude those who feel less comfortable with academic discourses. Asking of any text, "What is this like? What does it remind you of?"

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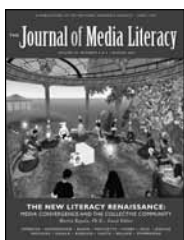
CULTURAL DIVERSITY:
Issues of Diversity in Media Education
[v55, n1&2, 2008, 80 pgs]

Guest edited by David Considine, this double-issue features articles regarding diversity in media education in light of the landmark election year in the U.S. Key authors include: Carlos Cortes, Cornell West, Cam Macpherson and others.



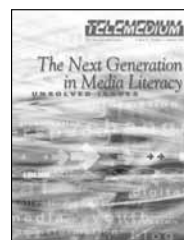
VIDEO GAME CULTURE
Seizing the Chance for Good Learning
[v52, n1&2, 2005, 104 pgs]

Edited by Martin Rayala. Opens the new educational connection between game culture and Media Literacy. Ten major authors in the field include James Paul Gee, Henry Jenkins, Idit Caperton, and Kurt Squire. Also includes Part III (of three) of *Emerging Authors: New Voices in Media Literacy*.



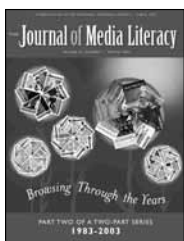
THE NEW LITERACY RENAISSANCE: Media Convergence and the Collective Community
[v54, n2&3, 2007, 80 pgs]

Edited by Martin Rayala. This issue features some of today's most advanced thinkers in the frontiers of new media literacy and the virtual world. Among the major authors are: Henry Jenkins, Alice Robison, Eric Zimmerman, Julie Frechette, and Renée Hobbs.



THE NEXT GENERATION IN MEDIA LITERACY Unsolved Issues
[v51, n1, 2004, 52 pgs]

Edited by Martin Rayala and Marieli Rowe. Addresses key media literacy issues from the 2003 International Video Conference: New Media & Digital Culture; Testing the Limits of Democracy; Global Media Education; and Media Literacy in Theory & Practice.



BROWSING THROUGH THE YEARS: PART 2 [v54, n1, 2007, 64 pgs]

Continues the retrospective from Part I: 50 years of Media Literacy as seen through the chronicles of the American Council for Better Broadcasts/National Telemedia Council; From early ACBB newsletters to the development of *Telemedium* and the *Journal of Media Literacy* (1983–2003).



TUNING INTO DEMOCRACY
Citizenship, Media & Media Literacy
[v51, n2, 2004, 52 pgs]

Guest edited by David Considine and Frank Baker. With feature articles by Barry Duncan, David Buckingham, Robert McChesney. Also includes Part II (of three) of *Emerging Authors: New Voices in Media Literacy*.



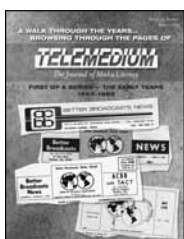
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES Integrating Media Literacy into the English Classroom
[v53, n2, 2006, 88 pgs]

Karen Ambrosch & Marieli Rowe, Editors. Featured authors include Donna Alvermann, Neil Andersen, David Considine, Barry Duncan, John Golden, Renée Hobbs, Jeff Share, Allen Webb, and others.



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[NTC 2003, book, 7"x9" paperback, 182 pgs]

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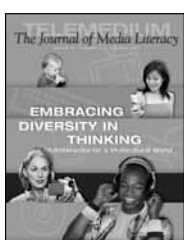
BROWSING THROUGH THE YEARS: PART I [v53, n1, 2006, 28 pgs]

A retrospective of the first thirty years of Media Literacy as seen through the chronicles of the American Council for Better Broadcasts/National Telemedia Council; From early ACBB newsletters to the development of *Telemedium* and the *Journal of Media Literacy* (1953–1983).



50 YEARS Toward a Media Wise Society
[2003, 12 pgs]

A brief publication which chronicles NTC's 50th Anniversary events including the International Media Literacy Forum and a statement of NTC's mission and philosophy.



EMBRACING DIVERSITY IN THINKING Multiliteracies for a Multicultural World [v52, n3, 2005, 24 pgs]

Edited by Karen Ambrosch. Features articles by David Buckingham, Carlos Cortés, Alan November, Kenneth Smith, Ronald Takaki.



MEDIA LITERACY AND THE ARTS Sounds, Images, Movement, Objects, Spaces, Experiences [v49/50, n1, 2003, 98 pgs]

Edited by Dr. Martin Rayala. A visionary, 100-page issue, building the innovative bridge between Media Literacy and the Arts. Five parts, with twenty-three authors.

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