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PRESENTATION TEXT

Media Literacy: The Foundation for Anywhere, Anytime Learning

Today's global media promote values, behaviors and products through common television programs, music, film, websites, games, apps and social media, yet audiences are unprepared to filter this information with common tools for discernment that are widely taught and understood. Media literacy is well-suited to fill this void, since it can offer a consistent framework for critical analysis that provides the agency that is needed in addressing media and information. In this context, it is important to recognize what media literacy is – and what it is not – to give an underpinning not only for understanding but for assessment and evaluation of media literacy and its effectiveness.

It is important to note that just producing media does not make a person media literate – although production/construction is an essential part of media literacy. It is the critical thinking APPLIED to production in a SYSTEMATIC way that makes a person media literate. In teaching, it is teaching ABOUT media rather than just teaching WITH media that distinguishes a media literacy pedagogy. This explains why having a credible framework for media literacy is essential: What makes one media literate is understanding media as a system of representation, and being able to both deconstruct and construct media.

If media literacy is to be an effective education strategy, then it must be consistent, measurable, replicable, and scalable. To be able to evaluate the efficacy of media literacy, consistency in approach and in philosophy is essential in implementing media literacy programs.

What common characteristics distinguish media literacy? First, media literacy helps individuals explore their deep and enduring relationship with media. In 1989, Eddie Dick, Media Education Officer for the Scottish Film Council, developed the Media Triangle, which illustrated the relationship between Text, Production and Audience. Understanding this relationship is fundamental to understanding the power dynamic between these three elements.

In looking at a common brand identity or logo, for example, it becomes evident that audiences have a shared understanding of the text – the logo – that was produced by a particular organization. The audience did not necessarily “ask” for this understanding, but because of

repeated exposure to the brand, people have internalized an understanding of what the brand means and how they may have interacted with it in the past. The producer has established a relationship with the audience through the text, which is the logo. Yet the audience exerts the ultimate power over the relationship when consciously deciding to engage or not.

Second, the focus of media literacy is on process rather than content. The goal of media literacy is not to memorize facts about media or be able to make a video or design a Web site. Rather, the goal is to explore questions that arise when one engages critically with a mediated message that contains facts or other content – print or digital. It involves posing problems that exercise higher order thinking skills – learning how to identify key concepts, make connections between multiple ideas, ask pertinent questions, identify fallacies, and formulate a response. It is these skills, *coupled with* engagement with factual knowledge, that form the foundation of intellectual inquiry and workplace productivity, and that are necessary for exercising full citizenship in a democratic society and a global economy (Thoman and Jolls, 2004).

Such skills have always been essential for an educated life, and good teachers have always fostered them. But they too often emerge only as a by-product of mastering content areas such as literature, history, the sciences and mathematics. Seldom are process or learning skills explicitly taught. But if society is to graduate students who can be in charge of their own continual learning in a media culture, learning skills must be “incorporated into classrooms deliberately, strategically and broadly” (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003, p. 6). As writer Alvin Toffler (qtd. in Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2003) pointed out, “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn” (p. 6). By its very nature, media literacy teaches and reinforces 21st century learning skills.

Third, media literacy education expands the concept of text to include all message forms – verbal, aural or visual (or all three together!) – used to create and then pass ideas back and forth between human beings. Full understanding of such a text involves not just deconstruction activities – that is, taking apart a message that already exists – but also construction activities – learning to write opinions and ideas with the wide range of multimedia tools available to young people growing up in a digital world.

Fourth, media literacy is characterized by the principle of inquiry – that is, learning to ask important questions about whatever one sees, hears, produces or engages with:

- Is this new scientific study on diet and weight valid?
- What are the implications of ranking friends on a social networking site?
- What does a “photo-op” mean?

With a goal of promoting healthy skepticism rather than cynicism, the challenge for the teacher (or parent) is not to provide answers but to stimulate more questions – to guide, coach, prod and challenge the learner to discover how to go about finding an answer. “I don’t know: How could we find out?” is the media literacy mantra.

Questions, of course, open up many more questions. And how one even approaches a question determines what answers one might find. Inquiry is also a messy process because one question leads to another and yet another. To keep inquiry on course and to provide a way to be able to master a process of inquiry, curriculum specialists look for a comprehensive framework to provide guidance and structure. Core concepts of media literacy, rooted in media studies by academics throughout the world, are a way to express common media characteristics that also distinguish media literacy from other disciplines. Various adaptations of core concepts have been developed, starting with 18 concepts originally named by Len Masterman in his seminal work, *Teaching the Media (1985)*, and eight core concepts used in Canada as a way of structuring curriculum. The U.S.-based Center for Media Literacy (CML) compressed the ideas into five core concepts. The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) provides a listing of Core Principles for media literacy, as do other organizations.

It is these core concepts, derived through media studies, that distinguish media literacy from other disciplines. The Center for Media Literacy (CML), one of the pioneering media literacy organizations in the United States, provides a research-based framework, focused on CML's Five Core Concepts and on Five Key Questions for deconstruction, through the release of its original CML MediaLit Kit™ in 2002. In 2007, CML enhanced its framework by adding Five Key Questions for construction of media messages and introduced a completed framework, called Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS™, see attached PDF file), to address questions from the viewpoint of both consumers and producers.

Q/TIPS serves as a "metaframe" that teachers, students and parents can grasp and begin to use immediately as a starting point; as training, curricula and assessments are built around the metaframe, the inquiry process deepens and takes hold as the central methodology for critical thinking and learning across the curriculum. Furthermore, this metaframe is an easier way to introduce 21st century skills than some of the more complex frameworks which, although representing desirable outcomes, are very difficult to implement and engage teachers.

Learning to ask and to apply the Five Key Questions to texts is a process skill that is not mastered the first time out. Once learned, however, the process becomes automatic as users build the habit of routinely subjecting media messages to a battery of questions appropriate to their age and ability.

As the cornerstone of the media literacy process, CML's Five Key Questions provide a shortcut and an on-ramp to acquiring and applying critical thinking skills in a practical, replicable, consistent and attainable way. They are an academically sound and engaging way to begin and they provide curriculum developers with a useable structure that can be applied to *any* subject:

Though being media literate implies having a broader skill set than simply evaluating a media product, evaluating a media product always involves the skills of media literacy. It is for this reason that the ability to conduct a media analysis using a process called "Close Analysis" or "Deep Deconstruction" is a fundamental media literacy skill. A key ability demanded in close analysis is to distinguish fact from opinion, and to be able to separate content information from contextual inferences. Acquiring this skill demands practice from an early age and it highly

complements study in language arts, so that both educators and students can easily and quickly analyze a media construction of any kind, regardless of the content area being addressed. These skills are fundamental to productively sharing information and acting upon information as informed citizens.

By instilling a common methodology for close analysis, students carry a consistent process of inquiry and habits of mind with them from grade to grade, from class to class, from subject to subject, from classroom to home, from school to work. This enables and deepens the development of a common vocabulary and a common understanding of both the media messages (the content and its forms) and the systems employed in global communications. Though content may vary infinitely, the process skills call upon consistent habits of mind.

Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS) provides a basis for measurable education interventions that can address *any* subject, anywhere, anytime. The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy can be internalized and applied on a lifelong basis. Q/TIPS lends itself well to curriculum development and to wide-scale adoption in educational settings, as well as with technology applications. CML has utilized the framework in professional development for pK-12 education and beyond, as well as for curriculum development and assessment. A recent evaluation of the CML framework by the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) has shown that this approach lends itself well to health-related education interventions, as well.

With content being infinitely available through technology today, it is the process skills of media literacy which must be taught, applied and internalized by new generations of avid media consumers. CML has pioneered since 1989 in identifying these process skills and in developing teaching and learning tools which insure that these skills can be shared and amplified in a world where being an effective information manager, a savvy consumer, a responsible producer and an avid participant in media culture is now a necessity for effective citizenship.

Thoman, E. & Jolls, T. (2004). Media literacy: A national priority for a changing world. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48(1), 18-29. doi: 10.1177/0002764204267246.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2003). Learning for the 21st century: A report and mile guide for 21st century skills. Retrieved October 22, 2009, from <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/downloads/P21.Report.pdf>

(PLUS attached PDF File showing CML's Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS) Framework)