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Media Literacy for Grown Ups

Media literacy implementation programs primarily focus on three audiences that all revolve around youth: parents, teachers and youth themselves. But it is important to remember that before parents or teachers can teach, they must first understand media literacy for themselves. And regardless of whether adults are focused on facilitating knowledge about media literacy for youth, they are by definition citizens and active participants in society.

Since few adults in any part of the world grew up learning media literacy concepts or indeed, even knew the words “media literacy,” there is a large gap in understanding about what media literacy is and why it is important. As digital media prevails more and more in most adults’ lives, the imperative for media literacy has become more urgent, and there is more recognition of the need for media literacy education.

Funding imperatives often encourage media literacy for youth, but fortunately, some pictures are emerging about media literacy for adults. Studies sponsored by the Australian government’s Communications and Media Authority; OfCom, the independent regulator for the UK communications industry; and Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry provide adult overviews of levels of media usage, comfort levels and barriers to media literacy for adults. Additionally, independent research conducted by Tina L. Peterson of Temple University around a specific application with a narrow audience – food and media literacy for adult women – also reveals and reinforces findings related to adult media literacy and how to best deliver such programs. These and other efforts, combined with programs for youth, provide the foundation for driving towards media literate societies that understand the importance of applying process skills to content knowledge – the skills to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with media in all its forms.

The challenges in teaching these skills are stubborn, and as with any education endeavor, success depends on each individual acquiring the needed skills. Understanding how to encourage and effect change on both the individual and societal level is key to the efforts of media literacy educators and practitioners. In this issue of *Connections*, we will see how media usage and understanding have changed during the past 10 years in Great Britain, review some existing research on adult understanding and barriers to media literacy; we will explore how processes for personal change work; and we will cite an example of how adult education can provide a sense of community and strengthen communities at the same time. Our MediaLit Moments activity encourages students to explore the different representations of men and women in media.

Research Highlights

Age Matters

Common themes emerge from a review of current research on adult media literacy – and unfortunately, when it comes to acquiring media literacy skills, age matters. It is no surprise to anyone that in today’s digital environment, the older one is, the less likely one is to be digitally savvy, with notable exceptions, of course. But being digitally savvy isn’t necessarily synonymous with the notion of being media literate, since criticality is essential to media literacy, and media are not always digital. It is in being critical thinkers that experience matters, and that the ability to learn on a lifelong basis offers hope for more wisdom.

A fascinating and informative study, published by Ofcom this month, reports on Adults’ Media Use and Attitudes, but this report stands out because it provides comparisons between OfCom’s initial study in 2005 with research conducted in autumn 2014 and reported now. Some findings are no surprise – for example, the fact that over the last ten years, internet use has increased substantially, both at home and elsewhere. But other findings reveal significant changes in attitudes and behaviors, as citizens become more experienced with online technology and social media.

Mobile phones continue to embed themselves into people’s everyday lives, and while 37% of people reported that they would miss their TV set more than any other device in 2014, this differs substantially by age. For younger age groups, mobile phones are the device that would be missed most. Nearly three quarters (72%) of internet users have a social media profile, compared to 22% in 2008. Furthermore, four fifths (81%) of these people use social media at least once a day; an increase from 30% in 2007.

People are using online media to undertake public or civic activities more now, while more people are also likely to check a bank balance or make a purchase online. A majority of mobile phone users now use their phone for content searching and content creation, a significant change.

More adults are aware of how commercial TV programs and search engine websites are funded, and concerns about content on the internet are still higher than for other media. While six in ten adults believe that some websites will be accurate and unbiased, adults are showing signs of being more privacy conscious. Four in ten internet users say they are “very confident” they can stay safe online, and the majority are aware of, and use online security measures. More findings with excellent graphics are available at <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/other/research-publications/adults/media-lit-10years/>.

In her research study, “[Exploring Baseline Food-Media Literacy of Adult Women](#),” Tina L. Peterson of Temple University responded to a call for more studies of adult media literacy by exploring the importance of production experience as a necessary component of adult media literacy. Although more people are accessing food media, they are also cooking less overall

and as a result, food production skills are declining – yet in examining media texts about food, food preparation experience factored positively into the study participants’ understanding. Peterson asked, “Does the average person know, for example, that most photos of food have been professionally styled and airbrushed? Can they recognize that food media messages on TV are highly edited and that the cook’s mistakes are often left out?”

The results of the two focus groups that Peterson and her colleagues conducted confirm that, when an individual had experienced producing and preparing food itself, and also media texts about food, those who had both types of production knowledge had capacity for critical analysis which was especially strong. Additionally, as discussions with each group progressed, Peterson noted that “the increase in evaluative and media literate utterances suggests that the process of guided inquiry itself may have served as an intervention.”

Petersen was also interested in seeing whether the critical responses to texts that the participants may have been personally knowledgeable about – such as making oatmeal cookies – could be applied to representations of unfamiliar objects, perhaps of sushi or less familiar foods. Although such a limited study cannot address the question of transferability of knowledge, there were indications within the focus groups that participants may be able to apply criticism to depictions of “strange” foods and food-related activities.

A national study conducted in the U.S. called “[Digital Media in Everyday Life](#),” done in 2011 by the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, found that there is a more significant digital divide among adults than among teens – but that this divide generally corresponds to what mobile devices the survey respondents own. Within families, youth and adults alike identify youth as the “digital experts.”

Although this study focused on digital media usage and comfort levels, the impact of actually using mobile technology and producing through social media was significant in terms of behavior and adults’ willingness to take action via digital means. And sex and education matters too – the 22% of adults who rated themselves lowest on their comfort with and knowledge of digital media skewed female (63%), older (80% over 35), and less likely to have a college degree (32%) than adults overall in the study. These same adults were much more likely to “never” buy tickets to a movie, museum or event online; 72% said they would never use a ticket kiosk, and 69% said they would never purchase tickets over the phone. On the other end of the scale, adult “Superusers” were two to three times as likely as the overall adult group to “always” use the digital option when given a choice. These same “Superusers” also demonstrated intense use of social media and more knowledge and use of newer digital technology. There was a strong correlation in adults who own a smartphone and those who consider themselves very knowledgeable about and comfortable with digital media.

“[Adult Digital Media Literacy Needs](#)” is a qualitative research report issued in 2009 by the Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) of the Australian Government. This report was commissioned as part of ACMA’s digital media literacy research program to understand the

attitudes and experiences of adult Australians who are non-users or limited users of digital media and communications. Through the study, ACMA intends to identify which digital media literacy gaps might best be addressed, and to develop appropriate media literacy policy initiatives.

Regardless of the fact that the study focused on non-users or limited users, the users themselves reported widespread awareness of the benefits of using digital media, particularly the Internet. People recognized that the Internet is playing an increasingly significant role in society, and they perceived that the convenience and time saving factors of using digital media – such as paying bills online or sending an email or having a wealth of information sources readily available – were useful. However, to be persuaded to use digital tools, they had to see that the benefit would outweigh the effort, and they perceived high barriers to usage. First, they did not have a broad vision of how the internet works and could not pick up transferable skills through associating commonplace language that has developed amongst regular users. They also did not have a clear understanding of security measures in place, and they were concerned about their security and the protection of personal details and information. And finally, their lack of a digital vocabulary made it more difficult to understand something or remember it; indeed, they learn and memorize individual steps in a way that is similar to rote learning.

The study divided participants into categories so that strategies may be developed for reaching and teaching them:

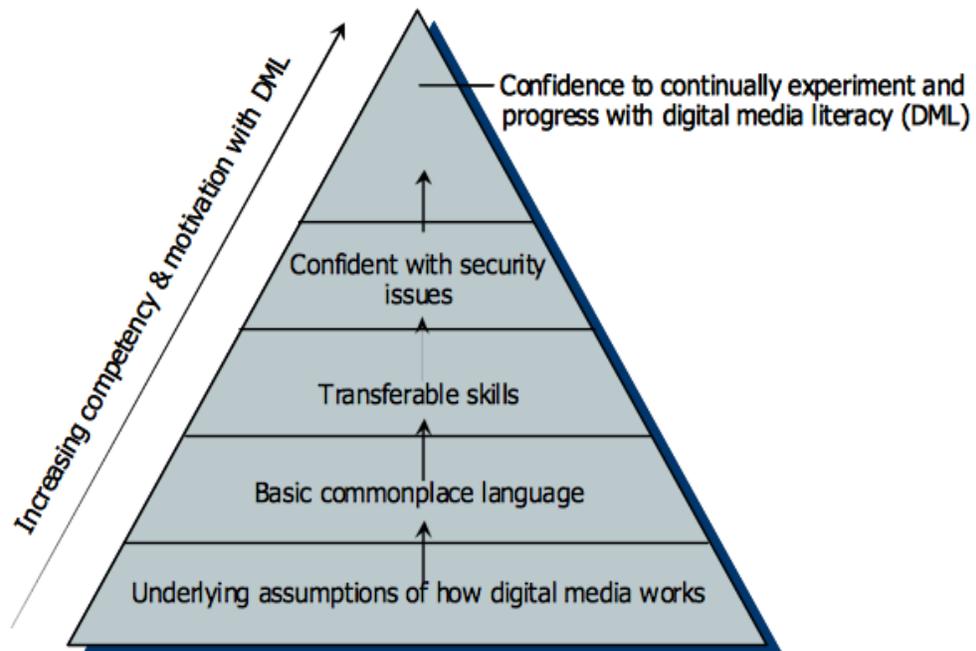
Summary of the attitudes of the segments

Figure 1 Summary of attitudes

	Resistors	Defensive	Thirsty	Potential Transitioners	Economisers
Defining attitude	No interest in technology – see it as worthless	Afraid to admit would like to learn more	Genuine desire to want to learn more	See technology as a means to an end but can see the advantages	Positive attitude but usage not a big priority to them
Behaviour	Non or little use of technology	Little usage – will only use applications they feel comfortable with	Begun using technology and can see the benefits	Use technology up to a point where can see it adds real value	Little usage because prohibited by costs
Skills Need	Sitting on the lower rungs of the skill hierarchy, they need to know the underlying assumptions of how digital media works and the language in order to develop transferable skills			Sitting on the middle rung of the hierarchy, should focus on building confidence with transferable skills and internet security	Sitting at the top of the hierarchy, need to encourage ongoing practice to prevent them losing skills
Demo-graphics	Older family Post family Recent retirees Male and Female Blue and white collar	Pre / Younger / Older Post Family More likely to be male More likely to be blue collar	Older family Post family Retirees Male and Female Blue and white collar	Younger / older / post Family Retirees More likely to be female Blue and white collar	Pre-Family Younger-Family Male and Female More likely to be blue collar

Furthermore, the study identified a Hierarchy of skills, knowledge and understanding upon which to build up from the foundation of understanding the underlying assumptions of how digital media works, to having the confidence to continually experiment and progress with digital media literacy (dml):

Figure 2 Hierarchy of skills, knowledge and understanding



Each of these skill sets requires practice and interaction with digital media; the fact that many of the study participants were not called upon to use digital media regularly is in itself a barrier to their acquiring skills.

An earlier Ofcom study from 2004, "[A review of the Research Literature pertaining to Adult Media Literacy](#)," had a stated purpose of outlining the range of studies conducted, the gaps in research, examples of innovative methodologies, and possible barriers and enablers to media literacy.

Key barriers to access were identified as demographic (age, gender, socio-economic status and disability); these in turn contributed to the material and symbolic barriers of finances, understanding, disposable time, and the production, content and design features of media technologies.

Additionally, the research pointed to a divide between a creative, sophisticated, "media-savvy" audience and evidence pointing to an often forgetful, confused, biased or inattentive audience low in critical literacy skills. While audiences often understood, enjoyed and trusted many broadcast genres, it was less clear that audience trust was always associated with good understanding or critical judgment, especially in relation to the news. Presciently, the study authors (Sonia Livingstone, Elizabeth Van Couvering and Nancy Thumim from the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science) commented that, "As channels of information proliferate, research suggests that many viewers are overwhelmed by multiple content sources that they find difficult to evaluate or compare."

The research review also revealed that “much research raises concerns that audiences lack the more complex skills for a sufficiently discerning or critical understanding to deal with the highly sophisticated construction of media messages,” and that adults are “often unaware of the provenance of information and may lack the skills to take into account the point of view from which information is presented. A considerable gap exists in our knowledge of how people understand advertising and the economic processes of online content production.”

Regarding media production, the study noted that “creating media content can have a therapeutic value in a health context,” and that “enjoying media creation is important to facilitating media literacy.” As a final note, the authors said that “media themselves can either facilitate or undermine media literacy, and that media providers have a key role to play.”

CML News



CML's New Web Site

Take a look at CML's re-designed web site. You will find more than 1000 pages of media literacy information including current research, historical archives, curricula, and teaching activities. Spend some quality time online with CML!



Center for Media Literacy on Facebook

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About Us...

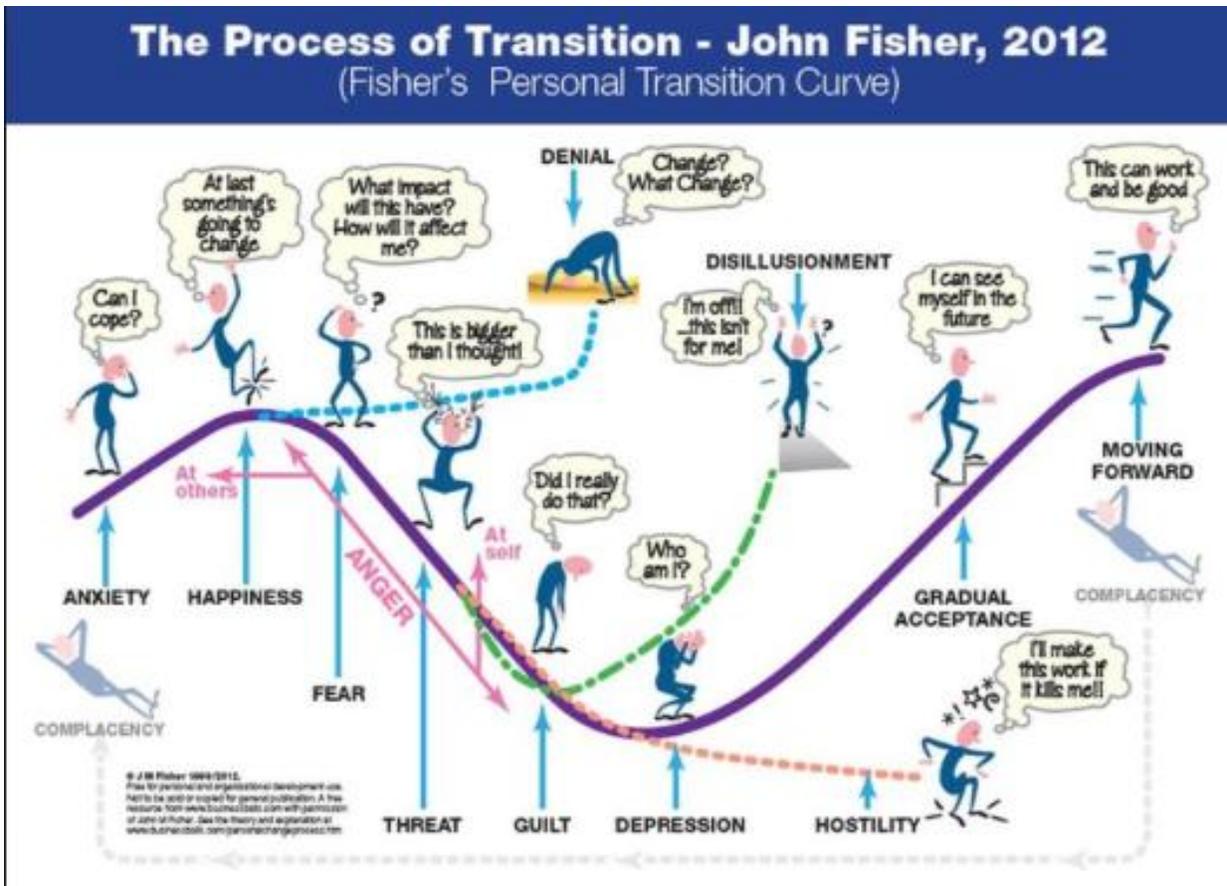
The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

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

<http://consortiumformedia literacy.org>

Resources for Media Literacy

At River's Edge: Transforming the World One Person at a Time



Adult life is marked by change, and change itself is marked by differences in our perceptions about ourselves – the very “constructs” upon which we build our identity. Media plays an important role in our efforts to change. As we acquire new information and access new ideas and worlds, we *are* changed. The Empowerment Spiral of Awareness, Analysis, Reflection and Action plays an important role in this process.

John Fisher updated his **Personal Transition Curve** (above) representing the stages of personal change in 2012; this Curve provides an introduction to personal construct psychology, or how individuals deal with personal change. However, in introducing systemic change – such as media literacy education – to organizations, we must recognize that whether change is beneficial or not, it still invites upset that is not always welcome. “Any change, no matter how small,” Fisher said, “has the potential to impact an individual and may generate conflict between existing values and beliefs, and anticipated altered ones...What will they be losing as part of the change, and what will they be gaining?”

As research studies show, the change that digital media has imposed on adults – especially older adults – is often bewildering. Such change has a cumulative impact, and, as Fisher noted, causes rapidly dropping self-confidence and increasingly negative self image, which just compounds the problem. On the other hand, Fisher said, “the more positive you see the outcome, the more control you have (or believe you have) over both the process and the final result, and the less difficult and negative a journey you have.”

[River’s Edge](#), a Wellness Center located in Cleveland, OH and now celebrating its 10th anniversary, targets its services primarily to baby boomers who are living the transition from an age known for industrial might to one focused on data digits. The Congregation of St. Joseph, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph Federation, conceived River’s Edge as a place where “all may be one” while “helping the dear neighbor,” a philosophy that originated with the founding of the Sisters’ order in LePuy France in 1650. River’s Edge’s motto is “A Place for Reflection and Action,” which makes the Center an ideal environment to explore media literacy and how it fits into everyday adult life.

Recently, River’s Edge included media literacy as part of its programming, which also includes spiritual practices such as yoga, therapy, art, and community outreach to homeless women, among others. “We recognized that our community is overwhelmed with information and that it is difficult to know what is true,” said Sarah Widener, River’s Edge Director of Programming. “We often address current subjects such as fracking or health issues like Alzheimers Disease, and we realized that, for people to be well informed and to make wise choices, they need help with developing skills of discernment. In offering our media literacy program, we came to see that media literacy goes deeper than we expected, and that it is important to look at the media system as a whole and to understand who is sending a message and why.”

The use of CML’s framework for media literacy is highly compatible with the approach that River’s Edge espouses. “We encourage our community to learn to be more intentional, and to acquire tools and support for growth and fulfillment. We emphasize spirituality and the whole person,” Widener said. “We look to transform the world one person at a time, and we believe that each individual affects the larger community – everything and everyone is connected.”

MediaLit Moments

How Does Media Represent Men? Women?

In this MediaLit Moment, students have an opportunity to work in teams to explore representations of men and women, and to construct their own depiction of their findings.

Ask students to construct a collage of images that represent men (or women) and to share their findings.

AHA!: The common images that we see of men and women are dramatically different for each sex.

Grade Level: 5-8+

Key Question #4: (Deconstruction) What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?

Key Question #4: (Construction) Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

Key Question #5: (Deconstruction) Why is this message being sent?

Key Question #5: (Construction) Have I communicated my purpose effectively?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Materials: Use about 5 magazines for each group of up to 5 students; color markers or pens, tape or glue; scissors, poster board OR use the GlogsterEDU program using computers with high-speed internet connection, LCD projector and screen.

Activity: Divide students into groups of up to 5 and assign each group to address “how men are depicted” or “how women are depicted”; provide materials and instruct them to construct a collage that reflects images of how men/women are depicted in media. Students have free reign over their creations – they can show pictures, cartoons, writings, headlines – whatever they find; they will undoubtedly see that they will develop a point of view amongst the group.

After the students complete their collages, ask them to present their findings and to discuss. Ask students if they were surprised by any of the information depicted – and if so, how? Did they feel the images they found were “real?” Discuss the sources of information/pictures that they identified and how the source may have influenced the type of depictions. Then, ask students to deconstruct their media products (the collages) using close analysis techniques and Questions/TIPS.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, ©2002-2015.