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## Theme: A Call to Action

### Pivot TV and Media Education for a Millennial Generation

For decades, media literacy advocates have been hesitant to partner with corporate media producers. Will the campaign essentially amount to buzzwords and lip service? Will the involvement of media literacy organizations simply add a patina of social responsibility to the company? Is it really possible to find a company which will actively promote media literacy education with entertaining content that accurately reflects the principles and philosophy of media literacy education?

In 2004, Participant Media, a company backed by the resources of the Skoll Foundation, began to produce films which featured top-notch talent and compelling stories even as they addressed important social and political issues. A sampling includes *Good Night and Good Luck*, *Fast Food Nation*, *The Soloist*, *Charlie Wilson's War*, *North Country*, *Lincoln* and *The Help*. On its website, Participant offered audiences opportunities to become involved in issues relevant to each of its films, whether through invitations to join grassroots campaigns, recommended reading, petitions, curricula, or original research conducted with partnering organizations.

In August 2013, Participant expanded into the realm of television with its new network, Pivot TV. In the process of creating a business model for the network, Participant executives had difficult choices to make. Participant had challenged many commercial interests in its nine-year history, but Pivot TV could not afford to accept advertising from only those companies which Participant was willing to rally behind. What's a socially conscious media company to do? Participant chose to educate the audience. Jaime Uzeta, Participant's Vice President for Social Action recalls, "We realized that this was something we needed to take head on. . . we wanted to have a direct conversation with our audience about our choices on advertising—not just a conversation with advertisers about guidelines, but a conversation with audiences about how media gets on air. We decided that we wanted to help audiences look beyond Pivot and to media in general."

Pivot TV was designed to target "Millennials" in the age range of 18-34 years, and staff at the network decided that research was needed to determine their media literacy needs. In July 2013 Pivot conducted a Digital Media Literacy survey in partnership with Miner & Co. Studio, Beagle Insight, and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Civic Engagement at Tufts University. Pivot found cause for concern. Among other findings, over half (56%) of respondents were not always confident in the accuracy of news and information they share online. To Uzeta, the results pointed to a clear direction for the campaign: "Despite the media savviness of young people, they still have trouble discerning the truthfulness of media. . . We realized that we needed to ensure that our audiences are empowered consumers who are using media most effectively."

Pivot created a media literacy campaign which encouraged audiences to:

- consider the sources of media and information
- recognize their role as sources of media
- consider the tradeoffs associated with engaging in media

In September, Pivot launched its campaign with a half-hour special, “Eyes Wide Open: This Is Media.” The film begins with a tight angle shot of a mouth speaking in front of a microphone: “This is media, right now. . . We are media producers, and we’re going to try to alter the way you think.” A “millennial” interviewee is astonished when he learns that Google makes as much as \$5,000 per year from his searching and browsing history. Alex Ohanian, co-founder of Reddit, tells the story of the sub-forum users created in response to pictures of suspects in the Boston Marathon bombing circulated by the FBI. Reddit-based cyber-sleuths used sophisticated techniques to comb through on-site television footage, then made completely erroneous claims about the bombers’ identities—all of which were echoed on Twitter and other social media sites. Ohanian reflected, “This is a tremendous power that we have now. We can be on a level playing field with anyone who has an internet connection. But it can also mean really bad ideas spread. I guess we’re all Spidermen and women now. With great power comes great responsibility.”

Additional episodes of “Eyes Wide Open” are in production, and Pivot plans to expand its campaign substantially. Uzeta explains, “We intended Digital Media Literacy as the primary campaign for the network. We plan to air original specials and documentaries, interstitials, PSAs, and to initiate grassroots campaigns. This will remain our primary campaign for the foreseeable future. . . “Eyes Wide Open” was an introduction to the key components of the campaign. In the future, we’ll break it out and go into greater depth on those pillars.”

Recently, the CML Key Questions figured prominently in a social action pledge called [Vet It Before You Share It](#) on the Pivot website, and we asked Uzeta to discuss the ideas and motivations behind “Eyes Wide Open” in relation to the Key Questions. Uzeta was incisive: “These are the questions we need to be asking ourselves as astute consumers of media. It’s already a challenge when we have media that’s produced by professional journalists. They all have potential perspectives, angles and agendas. It’s all the more important to ask those questions when a large portion of our media is created by our peers. Research shows that’s where a lot of people get their news from. . . It creates another layer of complexity. The content may come from someone we know and trust, but what about the media they’re forwarding? We need to cover all the dimensions of this.”

In addition, Uzeta argued that teamwork was essential to spreading awareness of the need for media literacy: “Throughout the next year we’re looking to find ways to get the media literacy pledge across to our audience, to help them experience and understand it. There are so many great resources out there on this topic. Bringing them together is part of what we do. But we don’t consider ourselves experts. We’re good at storytelling. As we build audiences, we can work with others—like you--to bring their expertise to a wider audience.”

## Research Highlights

### Two Peer-Reviewed Articles Affirm the Effectiveness of *Beyond Blame* and the CML Framework as Health Promotion Tools

As Robert Kubey and other media literacy pioneers expressed in the [Voices of Media Literacy](#) interviews (2011), media literacy will not gain widespread acceptance until a base of peer-reviewed research can attest to its benefits. Educators and advocates will be heartened to know that two peer-reviewed studies (published in 2012 and 2013) have demonstrated the effectiveness of both the CML framework and CML's *Beyond Blame* violence prevention curriculum.

In the first study, pre- and post-tests measured changes in student attitudes regarding violent media, and changes in knowledge about the Key Questions and Core Concepts of media literacy. The study demonstrated that students' thinking about media violence changed significantly—they were more likely to view media violence as a contributor to real-life aggression and other effects. And, compared with a control group, students participating in the *Beyond Blame* curriculum under the supervision of a teacher who had received prior media literacy training made significant gains in understanding the CML framework.

The first study was undertaken in seven school districts in Southern California during the 2007-2008 academic year. The second study, undertaken in fall of 2008, utilized a second post-test to assess the longer-term effects of the intervention. Analysis of the data indicated significant differences in the behaviors of students who had participated in *Beyond Blame* compared with students in a control group. Students in the control group reported increased media use and increased aggressive behaviors, including pushing, shoving, and threats of physical violence. Students in the intervention group were more likely to limit their media consumption, and showed no increases in aggressive behavior. The results are remarkable because current research predicts large increases in both these risk behaviors as students age. Kathryn Martin Fingar, a researcher at the UCLA Southern California Injury Prevention Center and co-author of both studies, was encouraged by the findings: "It's so hard to document behavioral changes resulting from classroom interventions. . .It's really promising to document these behavioral outcomes when students had participated in ten class sessions over the course of a single semester."

These studies make a number of significant contributions to research in the field:

- Very few studies of media literacy interventions have been undertaken over a period longer than a few months
- Other investigations have drawn from widely differing theoretical frameworks while both of these studies draw from a framework widely used by both K-12 educators and media studies researchers
- Teachers implemented a standards-based curriculum in a setting similar to other classroom environments across the country. The great majority of existing intervention

studies have been administered by researchers, and the curricula utilized have not consistently met relevant educational standards.

For many years, CML has argued that media literacy can and should be integrated across the curriculum. Kathryn Martin Fingar suggests a similar plan for studies of media literacy as a health intervention. “Using the same educational and theoretical basis, researchers could implement interventions in the areas of nutrition and substance use to test effects on multiple outcomes. Implementing those studies could also be a good way to encourage researchers and teachers alike to use media literacy curricula more often.”

References:

Webb, T., and Martin, K. (2012). Evaluation of a US school-based media literacy violence prevention curriculum on changes in knowledge and critical thinking among adolescents. *Journal of Children and Media*, 6(4), 430-449.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17482798.2012.724591#.UmfqC9vn-Uk>

Fingar, K., and Jolls, T. Evaluation of a school-based violence prevention media literacy curriculum. *Injury Prevention* online. Published 16 August 2013.

<http://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2013-040815>

[Vet It Before You Share It](#)

**Will you take the Participant Media Pledge to [Vet It Before You Share It?](#)**

I pledge to stand with the Center for Media Literacy and look past what's on the surface when consuming and creating media.

These are five questions I will ask myself when **analyzing** media.

1. Who created this message? All media messages are constructed, and knowing its author can shed light on the message's intended purpose.
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention? Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules. Many forms of communication appeal to the senses to convey their messages.
3. How might different people understand this message differently? Different people experience the same media differently.
4. What values, lifestyles, and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message? Media have embedded values and points of views.
5. Why is this message being sent? Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

These are five questions I will ask myself when **creating** media.

1. What am I authoring? I need to remember that I hold all the power (and responsibility) when creating media.
2. Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity, and technology?
3. Is my message engaging and compelling for my target audience?
4. Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles, and points of view in my content?
5. Have I communicated my purpose effectively?

Log on to sign the pledge, get more information or share your comments [Vet It Before You Share It.](#)

**CONSORTIUM**  
for **MEDIA LITERACY**

*Uniting for Development*

**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 communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

<http://www.consortiumformedia literacy.org>

## Resources for Media Literacy

### Leading European Education Ministry Launches New Media Literacy Initiative

Finland appears to have built one of the most successful educational systems in the world. Since the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Finnish students have scored at or toward the top of the European Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) annual surveys in reading, math and science. According to an *Atlantic Monthly* interview with Pasi Sahlberg, a representative of the Ministry of Education and a leading authority on Finnish educational reform, educational equity is the cornerstone of the Finnish system. In addition, the article notes that younger Finnish students are often engaged in creative play (Partanen, “What Americans Keep Ignoring About Finland’s School Success”).

In light of these developments, we examined the Finnish Ministry of Education’s new report, *Good Media Literacy: National Policy Guidelines 2013-2016*. We discovered that the report embraced many of the principles and strategies for implementation which CML has supported for decades. Here are a few highlights:

The Finnish Board of Education is reformulating its curriculum for students in (the equivalent of) the first grade on up, and treats media literacy as a *literacy* skill: “media literacy is seen as part of extensive reading and writing skills that each pupil should be able to acquire through learning over the years spent in basic education” (11).

Finnish education authorities appear to have a good grasp of the philosophy of media literacy: “Media literacy should be seen as comprehensive capabilities related to children’s and adolescents’ life management and education. Media lit is not only about information, skills, competence and mastering the use of media; it is way of existing and living in relationship with media” (23).

The authors of the report are very much focused on systemic reform: “Differences in media literacy can be leveled out by providing media education that is methodical and systematic, especially in early childhood education, in pre-primary education [the equivalent of kindergarten], and in basic education” (22). The report argues further that project-based development of curricula is vital, but should not replace systematic implementation, especially at the local level.

In 2009 and 2011, in a supplement to the national core curriculum, media education experts drafted media literacy education manuals for teachers in pre-primary and basic education. Proposed initiatives for disseminating media literacy research and practice also include:

- Increased media education in teacher education programs at all levels, as well as increased media literacy training for professionals in several related sectors, including libraries, culture , youth, social welfare, health care services, and media industries.

- The construction and maintenance of a multidisciplinary knowledge base in media literacy education, to be promoted and popularized for all stakeholders. In addition, the report calls for the establishment of collaborative research models at the confluence of formal academic research and field-based action research.

To learn more about this initiative, you can access this report at:

[http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2013/Hyva\\_medialukutaito.html?lang=en](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Julkaisut/2013/Hyva_medialukutaito.html?lang=en)

Additional reference: Partanen, Anu. "What Americans Keep Ignoring About Finland's School Success." *Atlantic Monthly* online, 29 December 2011.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/12/what-americans-keep-ignoring-about-finlands-school-success/250564/>

## MediaLit Moments

### Building Up and Tearing Down: Women on Television

The portrayal of women on talk shows, news and reality TV can sometimes be easy for audiences to recognize as positive or negative, demeaning or empowering. Are they role models for other women? Are they portrayed as someone you would never want to have as a friend? While the character or social position of these women may seem natural, or given, they're still constructed by the media in which they appear. In this MediaLit Moment, the sharply contrasting images of women in our media samples will give your middle and early high school students an opportunity to ask questions about the production decisions which support those portrayals.

**Ask students to analyze production elements in television shows which cast women in a favorable or unfavorable light.**

**AHA!** Women aren't just themselves on news and reality shows. The people producing the shows can make them look like creeps or model citizens, too!

**Grade Level:** 9-10

**Key Question #1:** Who created this message?

**Core Concept #1:** All media messages are constructed.

**Key Question #2:** What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

**Core Concept #2:** Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

**Materials:** computer with high speed internet access; LCD projector and screen

**Activity:** Ask students if there are any female television personalities that they really like or love to hate. What made them feel that way about that person?

Play a selected excerpt from the *Sixty Minutes* interview with Sonia Sotomayor:

<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=50148540n>

Follow this with a video from *Dance Moms* in which two of the mothers have a drunken fight on the streets of New Orleans. It may help to give students a little background information about the show. *This clip is PG13 for language and content.*

<http://www.mylifetime.com/shows/dance-moms/video/season-3/episode-37/fight-in-the-streets-of-new-orleans>

Allow students some time to express their reactions to the women portrayed in each of these

videos.

Next, introduce students to Core Concept #1, and to Key Question #2.

Show students the videos again and ask: Aside from the things these women do or say in these shows, what else might have created a positive or negative picture of them? (a couple of examples: footage of Sotomayor in the halls of the Supreme Court; the wide-angle, epic shots of the New Orleans street fight). You may wish to let students know that reality show producers often aim to heighten conflict between participants.

Do these shows support a portrayal of Sotomayor and the Dance Moms as empowered women? Why or why not?

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, © 2002-2013, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>