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## Theme: Media Literacy and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

*We want to develop inquisitive, creative, resourceful thinkers; informed citizens; effective problem-solvers; groundbreaking pioneers; and visionary leaders. We want to foster the excellence that flows from the ability to use today's information, tools, and technologies effectively and a commitment to lifelong learning.*

– National Educational Technology Plan, 2010

Twenty-first century skills are a top priority of the Obama administration's education agenda, and in its first chapter, the Ed Tech plan declares that schools must weave "21<sup>st</sup> century competencies" into all content areas; these include critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and multimedia communication.

In this issue of *Connections*, we demonstrate how students acquire 21<sup>st</sup> century skills as they engage with media literacy in the classroom, and we discuss the political and policy developments which are increasing the likelihood that 21<sup>st</sup> century skills will be included in American K-12 curricula. We show how media literacy students develop the "4Cs" of creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration as developed by Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Skills, and we review the National Educational Technology Plan and explain how media literacy education will be integral to the implementation of the plan's recommendations. This issue's MediaLit Moment sheds light on a recent incident that is a cogent argument for digital literacy in our schools. Your students will be able to weigh in on the issue, too. Whether your interest is in what happens in the classroom, the board room, or the halls of Congress, this issue has something for you.

## Research Highlights

### **New Ed Tech Plan Includes Media Literacy and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills**

In November, the Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology released a new national educational technology plan, the first since 2004. The plan, drafted by a working group of educators, researchers and policymakers and reviewed by several hundred stakeholders, from classroom teachers to district technology officers to representatives from educational content providers, does much more than advocate for the integration of technology into the curriculum. It lays out a rationale for using technology to change all aspects of education, from assessment to differentiation of instruction to administrative and financial decision-making.

From the outset, the plan advocates that 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies such as critical thinking, complex problem-solving, collaboration, and multimedia communication be woven into all content areas. Noting that American citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can no longer learn everything there is to know in a lifetime, and that most will change jobs throughout their lives, the plan calls on schools to help students acquire "adaptive learning skills that blend content knowledge with the ability to learn new things," requiring the development of "deep understanding with specific domains and the ability to make connections across domains" (p.13-14). Media literacy education itself can do both these things by deepening appreciation and understanding of content knowledge in individual disciplines, and providing students with a framework of concepts that can help them ask and answer questions across all the disciplines.

Drawing on previous research such as the 2008 MacArthur Foundation report "Living and Learning with New Media," which demonstrates that youth engage in more informal learning activities than might be apparent to educators far from home, the authors of the plan argue that the capacity of new technology tools to provide 'anytime, anywhere' access to formal educational content and programs can be used to leverage informal learning and empower students to personalize their own learning.

In the same chapter ("Learning: Engage and Empower"), the authors comment on a Kaiser Family Foundation study released this year which documents the increasing volume of entertainment media accessed by youth aged 8-18. They argue that the opportunity "to harness this interest and access in the service of learning is huge" (p.9). Imagine, then, the opportunities for learning when students can access technology tools to structure their learning experiences with the media content they consume at home. Students will be able to communicate readily with professional educators who can guide that learning as well.

The increasing potential of educational technologies to personalize learning could even create seismic changes in the way that learning is structured in K-12 schools. As the plan authors argue in several chapters, schools should move away from using classroom "seat time" as a measure of learning progress. Instead, students could earn course credit by demonstrating progress towards specific learning objectives, and could have a greater number of options for

demonstrating the extent of their progress, from electronic portfolios to individual and collaborative projects to content produced in online tutorials, and in courses blending online and face-to-face instruction.

The National Educational Technology Plan can be accessed from the Department of Education web site at: <http://www.ed.gov/technology/netp-2010>

### Media Literacy and the 4Cs

In response to national exams which seem to be reinforcing the traditional view that schools should focus on teaching the 3Rs of reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills has identified four core 21st century skills, or "4Cs," which should be included in any curriculum. These skills are: critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration.

Using these 4Cs as a basis for analysis, it's clear that the CML framework (Questions/Tips, Q/TIPS™) featuring the Five Key Questions and Core Concepts is a quick and accessible approach, "a shortcut" for teaching 21st century skills. To see the core skills defined, peruse the Partnership's learning framework at [www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org), or click this direct link:

[http://www.p21.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=120](http://www.p21.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=120)

How the Q/TIPS™ Framework aligns with the 4Cs:

- Critical thinking – The framework is a "shortcut" to critical thinking in both media deconstruction and construction. It helps teachers and students ask essential questions about the media from the perspective of consumers and producers. Q/TIPS can be used to sustain inquiry at any stage in the learning process – *any time, any where*.
- Creativity – The CML framework is uniquely effective because it does not simply prompt students to conduct story analysis or interpret media content but also helps them to generate ideas for thinking about media production. Q/TIPS offers an opportunity for students to explore their own assumptions about media and examine media products from perspectives other than their own. They connect the pushing of technology buttons to the creation and consumption of media.
- Communication – As many studies have revealed, youth have an intense interest in media. They have an intrinsic motivation to share what they learn-- but don't always know how. Q/TIPS provides a *lingua franca* of common concepts and terminology which students can use to discuss media, and inform their self-expression. This language extends beyond the cognitive domain, as students are able to use it to share moral, social and emotional understandings of media as well.
- Collaboration – The CML framework is designed for use as an organizing structure for collaborative work on both analytic and production projects. Media production typically demands teamwork whether making a video or creating a website, and students and teachers who gain substantial experience with the Q/TIPS framework often use it to build a community of practice that extends beyond any single project. Ultimately, it motivates students and teachers to reach a common understanding of the uses of literacy in a democratic society.

Media literacy incorporates critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration as a matter of course, and aligns seamlessly with the goals for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. In CML's experience, teachers are quite willing to tackle the Five Key Questions because they are applicable to *any* subject and offer a quick methodology to critical analysis and production.

## **P21 Partners with State School Chiefs, Appoints New Executive Director**

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) has been undergoing some far-reaching changes this fall, some of which have been shaped by the release of the Common Core standards and by the educational priorities of the Obama administration.

In a bid to help students compete in a global economy, the Obama administration has not only been encouraging states to integrate 21st skills into their curricula, but has also been encouraging states to adopt the Common Core instructional standards for English and Mathematics released this summer by the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The administration argues that common standards can ensure that students are 'college and career ready' before they graduate from high school, and states may also be required to draft and/or adopt new college- and career-ready standards when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as No Child Left Behind) is re-authorized.

In August, P21 and CCSSO agreed to a strategic management relationship under which CCSSO will provide financial and human resource management services as well as house P21 employees. According to P21 strategic council member Kathy Hurley, "The new relationship. . . is a unique opportunity for P21 to further align with the nation's chief state school officers. While P21 remains independent of CCSSO, there is tremendous synergy between our work, especially on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization, the Common Core State Standards Initiative, and CCSSO's Next Generation Learner Program" (P21 press release, August 25, 2010).

Given this new relationship, CCSSO is likely to solicit input from P21 if any updates to the Common Core standards are considered. In the meanwhile, P21 has resources and expertise to offer to CCSSO as it pursues its Next Generation program, which includes the design of a virtual magnet school and research into personalized learning systems.

In October, Timothy Magner was appointed executive director of the organization. Magner is a former deputy director of educational technology at CCSSO as well as a former director of educational technology at the US Department of Education. According to P21, Magner will focus on promoting the inclusion of the 4Cs within the reauthorized No Child Left Behind law, and ". . . as states look at implementing the Common Core State Standards, Magner will guide P21 as it helps states create next generation assessments" (P21 press release, October 5, 2010).

The Common Core initiative may be affected by such developments as well. Currently, the Common Core standards require students to use new media technologies as they present their work. So one of the "Cs" identified by P21, communication, has been integrated within them. If states make use of new, research-based assessments of 21st century skills as they implement these standards, all 4Cs could eventually be integrated within them.

Also of note, a new organization has been founded to assist district leaders in enhancing the 4Cs in schools. **EdLeader21** is a Professional Learning Community started by Ken Kay in 2010. Kay co-founded the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills in 2002 and served as its President for 8 years. For more information go to: [www.edleader21.com](http://www.edleader21.com)

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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 communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth. [www.consortiumformedia literacy.org](http://www.consortiumformedia literacy.org)

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

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*Uniting for Development*

## Media Literacy Resources

**Teaching Tip:** Take a minute to consider your own level of digital literacy (see this month's MediaLit Moments). It's difficult to talk to students about texting, e-mail, and social networking if you have not tried it yourself. Spend the time to get up to speed.

### Media Literacy and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills <http://www.p21.org>

The Partnership website has a wide (and quite possibly vast) array of policy and educational resources on the learning and teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The site includes a collection of valuable media literacy resources. Among these is an interesting classroom "snapshot" video profiling a film and visual literacy program in California (To access this video, go to Online Tools/Route 21/21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills/Snapshots) Also worth checking out are the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills implementation guides published late last year. These include guides for standards, curriculum and instruction, assessment, and more. Each contains a set of recommendations paired with short profiles of exemplary programs and schools, which seem to be proliferating quickly here and abroad. You'll find the implementation guides in the publications section of the P21 site.

"The Decline of Creativity in the United States: 5 Questions for Educational Psychologist Kyung Hee Kim" Encyclopedia Britannica Blog, October 18, 2010. Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/blogs>

This thought-provoking blog "interview" gives readers an in-depth view of the criteria that educational psychologists use to evaluate creativity, and some well-reasoned advice for parents on how to encourage creativity in their own children.

"The Creativity Crisis," by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman. *Newsweek*, July 10, 2010 Available at: <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/07/10/the-creativity-crisis.html>

This article follows the work of Kim and other creativity researchers and discusses the wider social implications of a decline in creativity in the United States.

"The Changing Media Landscape: Promoting a Systemic Approach to ICT & Media Fluency" State Educational Technology Directors Association. Available at: <http://www.setda.org/web/guest/toolkit2007/medialiteracy>

Though this policy toolkit from the SETDA is not fresh off the presses, the graphic "definition matrix" included here does a very good job of exploring the fluid borders between the various skills (including media literacy skills) which help define the term "ICT literacy."

"Web Sites on Literacies for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning," by Greg Byerly. *School Library Monthly*, May 2010. Available at: <http://www.schoollibrarymonthly.com>  
Search under "21<sup>st</sup> century learning."

Librarians, who are trained information literacy experts, are some of the most vocal proponents of education for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. This article shares valuable resources on information literacy and media literacy.

“Making the Case for Digital Literacy,” by Jane Tallim.

Media Literacy Week <http://www.medialiteracyweek.ca/en>

The Canadian government is currently in the midst of a Digital Economy Consultation process, and is soliciting comments on a number of topics including education for digital literacy. This article, by the co-executive director of the Canadian Media Awareness Network, explains the significance of digital literacy from a media literacy educator’s point of view. The graphic included in this article is a useful tool for conceptualizing digital literacy skills. Media Literacy Week is a joint project of the Media Awareness Network and the Canadian Teachers’ Federation aimed at promoting the integration of media education in Canadian communities and schools.

“The Five Key Questions That Can Change the World,” by Jeff Share, Elizabeth Thoman & Tessa Jolls, Center for Media Literacy <http://www.medialit.com>

This classroom activity guide has 25 core lesson plans for K-12 media literacy. Lessons feature the Five Key Questions for Deconstruction and introduce elements of Construction within each activity.

## MediaLit Moments

### Using a Smartphone Isn't Always the Smart Thing to Do

In the world of education, teachers, parents and principals worry about what students are doing in class with their cell phones. Are they texting each other and not paying attention? Are they “Googling” answers to tests and cheating? Did you ever imagine that the same sort of malfeasance might pop up in the world of politics? That’s exactly what happened during a Florida gubernatorial debate this fall. In a debate televised on CNN, Democratic candidate Alex Sink received an e-mail on her Smartphone from a campaign aide during a commercial break, violating the rules of debate. Sink’s phone was confiscated, and Republican candidate Rick Scott immediately criticized Sink for breaking the rules once the debate resumed.

On election day, Sink lost to Scott by a margin of 1.2%. We will never know the degree to which Sink’s moment of ‘digital illiteracy’ swayed voters, but we do know that interest in the news stories which followed was high. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to ask—and answer—the same questions about digital ethics that viewers and voters responded to during this race. As they do so, they’ll learn how different audiences, young and old, react differently to televised coverage of politics and the way in which digital media are used.

#### **Have students re-enact a particularly tense moment from a televised political debate**

**AHA!** Breaking the rules by reading a message on her phone might have cost this candidate the election!

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

**Grade Level:** 6-9

**Materials:** Computer with high speed connection; data projector and screen; printed copies of news story (optional); phone to use as a theatrical prop

CNN news blog with embedded video of Sink looking at her phone during a commercial break, and Scott responding as debate resumes; accessible at:

<http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/10/25/florida-debate-foul/>

**Activity:** Use the CNN story and the embedded video to establish what happened, and explain the reasoning behind the rules for this debate. Discuss briefly with students.

Ask for two students to volunteer to re-enact one scene that was left out of the video: the moment when someone from CNN staff actually confiscated the phone from Sink. The two students should have a few minutes to think about how they’re going to react to each other, and you might want to allow other students to help them. Both players should be able to

explain why they're doing what they're doing on stage.

Once the scene has been re-enacted, keep the volunteers in front of class for a brief moment (unless they're incredibly embarrassed). Poll students for their reactions. Should this candidate have been punished by losing her phone? Should the CNN staff member have taken it away? Should the aide who sent the message have been fired? Also, if they had been voting in this election, would they have been more likely to overlook Sink's mistake, or would they have been more likely to 'punish' her at the polls?

As you discuss the responses of students and voters, draw attention to Core Concept #3— people respond differently to what they see on television, and in any form of media, including phone, email, and text messages.

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, © 2002-2010, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>