

In This Issue...

Theme: What Media Literacy Is and Is Not **02**

Media literacy is not teaching with media, it's teaching about media. The difference between the two is not at all trivial, but indeed profound. In this issue of Connections, we explore the differences between media literacy and other approaches to media in the classroom.

Research Highlights **04**

Writing within a cultural studies framework, Len Masterman helped to revolutionize the field of media studies in his 1985 book Teaching the Media. In doing so, he also articulated the core principles of media literacy education.

Also, an interview with media literacy educator and scholar Gretchen Schwarz on the goals of media literacy education.

CML News **10**

CML is featured in the December issue of Media and Learning News.

Media Literacy Resources **11**

Find a concise guide to what media literacy is NOT

Med!aLit Moments **12**

In our MediaLit Moment for this issue, your students will have the chance to discover just how essential music scores are to telling the story of a film.

Theme: What Media Literacy Is and Is Not

Conducting a Google search seems like such a straightforward process. Enter search terms. Press button to submit. Google returns pages of websites and boldfaced text from those sites which include the search terms. Google has brought you these results by scouring the farthest reaches of the world wide web. Well. . .not exactly. Google personalizes search results based on your web search history. For example, if you've been conducting searches on the Occupy Wall Street protests, you may see some of the same results in your next search for other political news. The same search by a different user on another computer could yield a different palette of results entirely. Google Search may be a new media tool, but the personalization of results raises questions about the way the medium of the Internet is constructed, and these are questions which have been central to media literacy education for decades.

In his 2011 book *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You*, Eli Pariser discusses his concerns about a world wide web in which commercial sites from Netflix to the Washington Post attempt to out-do each other in anticipating your choices and tastes. Pariser argues that the web is increasingly serving us the equivalent of junk food—information we impulsively reach for which may not always be good for us. What would be good for us? Information which is not just relevant to our lives, but also is important, challenging to us, and delivered from different points of view. (Pariser offers a quick summary of his arguments in a TED presentation from February 2011). In other words, Pariser is arguing that we need a healthy media diet.

But in addition, Pariser's method of investigation owes a debt to the field of media literacy scholarship. His book reveals that searches for information do not give us an objective snapshot of what is available on the world wide web because commercial interests help determine what we see. Forty years ago, Len Masterman's own research on the medium of television brought similar insights: "I suppose the big step forward was to recognize that. . .we were looking at how television. . .was trying to present itself as being a window on the world. The analogy is with a transparent sheet of glass that you can look through. Ideally, when you look at TV, you are actually looking through a window at reality. And what that denies is human agency. What it denies is the fact that these images are actually produced; they are selected and edited and packaged" (from [Voices of Media Literacy](#)).

In other words, all media are constructed, and this principle of media literacy remains vital to education in the 21st century. In this issue of *Connections*, we parse out what media literacy education is and is not, and more often than not, attention to the constructed nature of media is the bright line dividing media literacy from other educational practices. In our first research article, we discuss Len Masterman's classic *Teaching the Media*, as well as Voices of Media Literacy interviews with other media literacy pioneers, to illuminate the differences between media literacy education and other approaches to media in the classroom. In our second research article, we interview Gretchen Schwarz, an educator and scholar who teaches

courses in media literacy education at Baylor University, to gather insights on contemporary media literacy practice. In our resources section, we offer a short, bulleted list of what media literacy is NOT. And in the MediaLit Moment for this issue, your students will discover that film soundtracks aren't just 'sonic seasoning,' but actually play an integral part in telling a film's story.

Research Highlights

What Media Literacy Is and Is Not

In many respects, media literacy education in the United States began in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a response to the growth of protectionist organizations such as Action for Children's Television and others. Marieli Rowe, speaking of her involvement with the American Council for Better Broadcasts, aptly describes the alternative approach which she and other educators decided to pursue: "We were always based on a philosophy that did not tell anyone what was good and bad, but asked people to think about it, evaluate, and come to their own conclusions" (from *Voices of Media Literacy*). From a media literacy point of view, teachers should not function as arbiters of taste and quality in the classroom. Instead, their goal should be to help students build their capacity to evaluate any media text.

Media literacy education does much more than help students make their own choices about media, however. Media literacy educators encourage students to think deeply about the human decisions which lead to the creation of media products. Writing in his landmark 1985 book *Teaching the Media*, Len Masterman explains, ". . .television, newspapers, films, radio and advertisements are *produced*. The media are actively involved in processes of *constructing* or *representing* reality rather than simply transmitting or reflecting it" (p.20).

Masterman realized that he had not only come up with a new conceptual model for media analysis, but also with a first principle for media education. Students shouldn't just examine the content of media messages, but should also investigate the ways that media texts are constructed by asking questions such as, Who made this? For what purpose? What kind of world is represented in it? How does the producer hope I will respond to it? These are the questions that led to the formulation of the Key Questions and Core Concepts in use at the Center for Media Literacy today.

Learning how to ask these questions is also important for students who are producing media. For example, in 2008, CML received an inquiry from Northeast Access Radio (NEAR), a media co-op which trains residents of Dublin, Ireland to produce their own radio programming. NEAR was interested in augmenting its offerings to trainees with instruction in the use of the CML framework. As Development Coordinator Jack Byrne remarked, ". . .we have discovered that the commonly expressed belief, that through practical work, people will automatically acquire critical abilities. . .is a complacent misconception. If this focus on media criticism is not foregrounded, practical work can lapse into an uncritical aping of mainstream media" (See issue #6, *Sexism in Media*, for the complete story). To translate that concern to a more distinctly American milieu, imagine the educational opportunities that are lost when students are asked to produce their own short film and decide to use Hollywood action blockbusters as a model—but without any direction to investigate the social worlds represented within them.

The emphasis in media literacy education on the constructed nature of media also leads to a changing conception of the role of media audiences. For example, from a media literacy perspective, the purpose of the commercial media is not to sell advertised products to audiences, but rather to sell audiences to advertisers. What does it mean to “sell” the audience? It means that the values embedded in media content, from news to entertainment, all support the purchase of consumer goods as a normal and valid pursuit. Media producers work to deliver audiences to advertisers who are pre-disposed to buy their products. In the end, all media texts, including the best journalism available, prime audiences to accept a particular view of the world. It’s for this reason that media literacy educators favor exploration of the media from multiple points of view, especially those of students.

Perhaps the most important distinguishing feature of media literacy education is its insistence on teaching *about* media rather than teaching *with* media. One of Masterman’s main arguments in *Teaching the Media* can be summarized this way: Teachers shouldn’t privilege ‘educational’ media over the ‘escapist’ entertainment media students like to consume. All of it is constructed. Are you thinking of screening a documentary in class? Any documentary, from *Waiting for Superman* to Ken Burns’ history of jazz, is a rich field for examining the way in which knowledge is represented to audiences.

But it isn’t just educational media which needs to be deconstructed. Our educational system deserves the same treatment. Masterman writes, “. . .a pedagogy which is concerned to de-naturalize media texts and to ask in whose interest they are produced . . .can hardly avoid raising precisely those questions in relation to the school curriculum itself . . .”(p.30). Schools position themselves as authoritative purveyors of information, and teachers are licensed to transmit knowledge—that transparent window onto reality—to students. Masterman asks, “How and why has this information been selected?. . .Against what and whom is this knowledge directed?” (p.32).

It’s for this reason that media literacy education is not just a pedagogical method, but is the practical expression of an entire [philosophy of education](#). Students aren’t just audiences whose points of view deserve consideration. Through the Empowerment Spiral of Awareness, Analysis, Reflection and Action, students themselves can become important sources of knowledge and insight.

Interview with Gretchen Schwarz

Gretchen Schwarz is a media literacy educator who has spent 13 years in K-12 classrooms. She earned a Ph.D. in Secondary Education at the University of North Texas, Denton in 1991. Since then, she has taught media literacy theory and practice to undergraduates, teaching credential candidates and graduate students at Oklahoma State University and at Baylor University, where she currently serves as a professor in the department of Curriculum and Instruction. Dr. Schwarz’s continuing interest in media literacy education is complemented by recent research on the use of graphic novels in the classroom.

We interviewed Schwarz just before the Thanksgiving holiday, and in these interview excerpts, she gives her views on the goals of media literacy education.

CML: How did you develop an interest in media literacy?

GS: When I was a high school English teacher in the 1970s, I realized that there was a lot more going on than the printed word, but I didn't have a word for it. In 1996 or 1997 I saw a PBS special which featured a panel discussion with David Considine and Renee Hobbs, among other people. . . . At that point I was teaching English Education at the university level, and after seeing this special, I realized that there was still something missing, and it sounded like media literacy might be it. That's when I became involved with the New Mexico Media Literacy Project. My hometown is Albuquerque, and in 1998 I managed to take a semester sabbatical there and spend time with project staff. . . . Their emphasis at the time had a lot to do with the negative effects of media. They created health campaigns, for tobacco and drinking, and that's what I thought media literacy was at first. But as part of my sabbatical, I spent time sitting in on [K-12 school] classes in town. Spending time with students made me think, is this all there is to it? In one class, Rob Williams, a teacher who had written a lot of curriculum, played a song about throwing the TV out the window. I thought, I'm not going to do that. I felt sort of guilty for a while until I realized there was another way to look at it.

I can't remember how I connected with NAMLE, but somehow I found them online. . . . I attended my first conference in St. Louis in 2007, and there I really connected with people I had been reading about. Renee Hobbs and Liz Thoman and others led me to a different approach to media literacy. It's still about critical thinking, but not anti-media per se. I agree with what they publish in their core principles. It's not just about beating up on media. It may include serious criticism, but that isn't all there is to it. In truth there are many things that we can benefit from and enjoy in media.

CML: If a school is focused on students absorbing media content on health and behavioral issues like drunk driving, how might you encourage the school to add a media literacy component to instruction?

GS: If you don't have an open discussion about it, and ask, what's the other point of view?, kids will know that they're being told a bunch of stuff. Why do people drink? Can it be fun? Why do some people have problems while some don't? You have to go into those grey areas, where administrators are not often eager to go. But that's the educative part of it in my mind. If someone has developed a PSA about not drinking, we can all agree that it's not a good thing, but we can still analyze and evaluate the PSA as a message. Do you really believe it? Do you think it would be convincing to other kids? These are the kinds of questions that kids should be allowed to explore.

CML: How do you explain the difference between teaching with media and teaching about media to teachers unfamiliar with media literacy?

GS: There's a lot of pressure to teach with media, and a lot of good opportunities for it. I always emphasize that the media themselves deserve consideration, that they're not merely a tool. You need to be able to think critically about the media themselves, to be able to compare them. For example, you can talk with teachers about compare-and-contrast English essays and the ways you might compare a story and a film. It's hard to get the difference across, though. It's not a very common notion, and frankly, we're not in a place in public education where critical thinking is valued, especially with the public mandates we're dealing with like No Child Left Behind. You kind of have to work at it.

CML: What media literacy courses have you taught?

GS: I'm sometimes asked to talk to methods classes (social studies, for example), so I talk about media literacy there . . . I've given presentations to teachers, including presentations at summer workshops. Last summer I gave a presentation at a two day teacher workshop. Teachers had a choice of workshops. . . . I illustrated what media literacy is by asking teachers to work with something they had already taught. You taught *The Diary of Anne Frank*? What might you find out about Anne Frank on Wikipedia? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the content? Most teachers tell students they can't use it, but everybody does. The question is, what are Wikipedia's strengths as a source of information? You have to make presentations specific to how instruction is enacted in the classroom. Teachers don't have time to add subject matter, so it must be tied to something they're already doing.

CML: Have you found ways of using media production assignments to help teachers understand the importance of teaching about media?

GS: Sometimes I will take part of a class period with my graduate students where we'll all fool around with flip cameras and try them out ourselves. This semester my students are getting involved with production themselves, and I ask them to reflect, what did you learn through the process? How do you help students as they learn how to use the tools? How do you assess that learning? . . . We have some good assessment materials from Chris Worsnop, but it's still a big question. If you do it in public schools, you will have to assess it.

CML: How might educational technology instructors help students learn about media?

GS: You mean, how can you get educational technology teachers to teach media literacy? Sometimes you can do that successfully, and sometimes not. They think they already know media literacy because they know how to use the media. You just can't convince them that there's more to it—but with some you can. The head of educational technology at our school of education has caught onto that. He gives tech updates at meetings, and at the last meeting he gave us a list of four books about Internet use. I can't remember them all, but one of them was *The Shallows* [a new book by Nicholas Carr which builds on the arguments in his controversial 2008 *Atlantic* article "Is Google Making Us Stupid?"]. I told him how much I appreciated what he was doing. . . .

Working with educational technology teachers requires an ongoing conversation. They get so excited about how the technology works, and what you can do with it. But you always want to ask critical questions. What can't you do with the technology? What are its limitations, its biases? Early on there were teachers trying out software programs intended to help people write, but as far as I could tell, it would have been so much easier to use a pen and paper. Why is it better on a computer screen? Second Life might be cool, but what might be the downside? What can you do here in person that you can't do in Second Life? I don't mean to be critical all the time, though. I try to show up and be enthusiastic.

CML: How would you explain the difference between teaching with media and teaching about media to library media specialists? What can they do to enhance teaching about media in schools?

GS: It's a lot easier to develop a partnership with librarians. Last summer I edited a special issue of *Action in Teacher Education* on media literacy, and several librarians had sent in pieces. . . They're pretty open to it. Librarians were advocating for graphic novels pretty much before anyone else. If you get together and talk with them about media literacy, they'll understand what you're saying. The problem is, in the academic world, you don't get to talk with them often--not in teacher education programs, anyhow, which doesn't make sense. They have that technological knowledge, but are more willing to talk about ups and downs.

CML: I just finished reading Len Masterman's *Teaching the Media*. In one section of the book he criticizes the typical characterization of entertainment media as escapism and documentaries as educational media to teach with. He points out that this characterization glosses over the possibility that documentaries might be constructed. Do you have any comments on documentaries and media literacy instruction?

GS: Social studies teachers can use media literacy, if they're aware of it. One of my doctoral students put together some really neat lessons in which she combined media literacy with examination of documents. What are primary documents? What aren't? How do you interpret them? How is this photo arranged? Is this just how it happened? Already during the Civil War people were staging pictures before they were taken. It's a great area for exploration. Social studies people are starting to think about that, especially social studies teachers' associations. Are we going to say, here's the true media and here's the false media? I can't generalize from my one doctoral student, but the things that I've read from social studies educators shows that they're starting to look at the influence of the media themselves, on the content of history, of economics.

CML: Is there anything else you'd like to say about media literacy education?

GS: At the heart of media literacy is the notion of critical thinking--asking questions, making things that seem obvious problematic. Even Ken Burns--and he's a good documentarian--has a point of view in his documentaries. In a sense, media literacy education is not only

interdisciplinary, but trans-disciplinary, enriching our understanding of any subject matter as we keep asking those questions about how we learn things. Whether you're looking at a textbook or a YouTube video, you still need to ask those basic questions. Media literacy involves more than saying, here's a great book or graphic novel to use in history class. How does this graphic novel portray the Holocaust differently from a book, or "Schindler's List"? You have to go on a little bit further. Media literacy doesn't just ask, what do we know? but *how* do we know?

I also try to keep that critical awareness in my graduate classes. If we're looking at the *Frontline* program "The Merchants of Cool," we talk about the content, but we also ask, what's Doug Rushkoff up to here? What's left out? It's about reflection on reflection on reflection. In media literacy education it's easy to get caught up in issues like violence and sexism—Media Education Foundation materials are really good for that, they really get you going—and not step back and ask, how are those issues being discussed? It's the literacy aspect of looking at media literacy materials.

[Media and Learning News](#)

CML is featured in the December issue of Media and Learning News. Read [A Quest for Questioning](#).

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.

[**www.consortiumformedia literacy.org**](http://www.consortiumformedia literacy.org)

Resources for Media Literacy

Teaching Tip: YouTube has started an educational section to help teachers quickly and easily find appropriate videos for use in the classroom. Take a look at [YouTube.com/schools](https://www.youtube.com/schools). For a tutorial go to [YouTube.com/teachers](https://www.youtube.com/teachers).

What Media Literacy is NOT

The following is a list of ideas to help explore and understand how media literacy is different from other literacies and what are some of the basic elements of a more comprehensive media education.

- Media 'bashing' is NOT media literacy, however media literacy sometimes involves *criticizing the media*.
- Merely producing media is NOT media literacy, although media literacy should include *media production*.
- Just teaching with videos or CDRoms or other mediated content is NOT media literacy; one must also *teach about media*.
- Simply looking for political agendas, stereotypes or misrepresentations is NOT media literacy; there should also be an *exploration* of the systems making those representations appear "normal."
- Looking at a media message or a mediated experience from just one perspective is NOT media literacy because media should be examined from *multiple positions*.
- Media Literacy does NOT mean "don't watch;" it means "*watch carefully, think critically*."

With thanks to Renee Hobbs, Chris Worsnop, Neil Andersen, Jeff Share and Scott Sullivan.
([What Media Literacy is NOT](#))

MediaLit Moments

How Does the Story Sound?

Before the advent of “Star Wars,” musical scores had become some of the most sophisticated special effects available to film producers. A train of European classical composers began arriving on American shores in the 1930s and 1940s, and some, like Eric Korngold and Franz Waxman, wrote grand, symphonic scores that burnished the golden age of Hollywood film. These and other golden era composers also set the standard for writing scores which could vividly communicate and comment on the story unfolding on screen. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to analyze the role which musical scores play in feature films, and an opportunity to interpret a sample score as well.

Have students analyze the narrative function of a film score

AHA!: The music doesn’t just keep me watching the movie—it helps me understand the meaning of what’s happening on screen!

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

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

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: Television, DVD player, CD/MP3 player; DVD of Tim Burton’s “Alice in Wonderland” (2010), CD of film soundtrack by Danny Elfman, or MP3 file of single track from this score.

Activity: Introduce students to the topic. Do they remember the soundtrack to any particular movies? What did they like about them?

Let them know that they’re going to break a movie into separate parts—soundtrack, action on screen, and complete movie with soundtrack, dialogue and action—to help them think closely about how a soundtrack helps tell a film’s story.

Play the track “Proposal/Rabbit Hole” from the “Alice in Wonderland” soundtrack for students. You should be able to download a single MP3 file of this track if you wish.

Don’t mention the movie title or even the title of the track. Ask students to guess the kind of movie the track is from, and what might be happening on screen during a track like this one.

There are two contrasting cues within this track, so you'll want to ask what might be happening from cue to cue as well. Key Question #3 comes into play here, so have fun discussing the different answers that students come up with.

Next, play the corresponding sequence from the film with the sound muted.

(In this scene, a young aristocrat proposes to a teenaged Alice in a gazebo, but Alice sees the White Rabbit beckoning to her from behind the gazebo, and decides to run away).

Ask students what they believe is happening in the film. How might the music they listened to "fit" into this sequence?

Now play the complete sequence, including soundtrack, action and dialogue.

What does the music tell you about the character of Alice, and about the story? How does it do that?

Repeat the steps in this activity if needed.

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, © 2002-2011, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>