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In 2010, CML published the Voices of Media Literacy, a collection of interviews with 20 media literacy pioneers who were active in the field prior to 1990. Their views not only shed light on the development of media literacy, but also on where they see the field evolving and their hopes for the future. In this issue, we add one more pioneer to the list.

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Media Literacy Pioneers

In 2010, CML published the *Voices of Media Literacy*, a collection of interviews with 20 media literacy pioneers who were active in the field prior to 1990. These pioneers represent the English-speaking countries of the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the United States. Their views not only shed light on the development of media literacy, but also on where they see the field evolving and their hopes for the future.

We initially set out to locate as many media literacy pioneers as we possibly could, and we were pleased to find and interview 20! Today, it is our privilege to add one more pioneer to the project. With excitement and gratitude we offer this interview with media literacy pioneer Dorothy G. Singer.

Dorothy Singer is the retired Senior Research Scientist, Department of Psychology at Yale University. Her early career focus was the study of how young children play, but over time she incorporated how children respond to television in regard to play and imagination. She conducted one of the first studies on this topic in 1981 and was one of the first to prepare a curriculum on teaching critical use of TV that was used in hundreds of schools across the country. She brings yet another perspective and voice to the history of media literacy and we are fortunate to have her words documented as part of the CML *Voices of Media Literacy* project.

All of the pioneers represented in this project have devoted significant portions (if not all) of their careers and yes, their lives, to media literacy, even before the term media literacy was invented. Without exception, each recognized – very early – that although media is a fascinating subject, it is teaching about media, not just teaching with media, that distinguishes media literacy education. You can find all of the interviews on the [CML web site](#).

It is our hope and expectation that these discussions will provoke ideas and will gestate more debate and more importantly, action. We stand today on the shoulder of these giants, of these remarkable people who helped launch a great movement and discipline that is so central to our times and to the future; their perspective and experience are invaluable and instructive.

In this issue of *Connections*, you can discover more about the past by hearing from a pioneer in the field, and you can help to shape the future by participating in the first U.S. Media Literacy Week, November 2-6.

Research Highlights

Transcription of CML Interview on July 18, 2015

Interviewer: Tessa Jolls

Interviewee: Dorothy G. Singer

Dorothy G. Singer, Senior Research Scientist, Department of Psychology, Yale University (retired)

TJ: How did you become involved in your work and in media education?

DS: Actually, we hadn't been studying television at all. My husband and I were really studying play and trying to understand why children play, trying to see whether there were good players, poor players, or children that don't play at all. Contrary to everyone's feelings, people think that children just automatically start playing imaginatively.

One day while we were in a daycare center observing children for our play study, the teacher came over to us and said, "They're playing Peter Pan all day long and I don't understand why." The other teacher came over and said that it was because Peter Pan was on television the previous night. So the teacher then asked the children "How many of you saw Peter Pan last night?" and every hand went up.

That evening my husband and I, over a cup of coffee, said that it was interesting that they saw Peter Pan on TV and played it the next day. We hadn't looked at television when studying play, and we thought that maybe what we ought to do was take a look at how TV was affecting children's imaginations.

So actually that incident in the daycare center got us on the road to new research. We applied for a small grant to take a look at Fred Rogers' program because we had watched that on public television and were very impressed by his imaginative material, by his world of make believe where he pressed a trolley button and went into a little world of kings and queens, and make believe stories.

We applied for a grant through the Child Study Center at Yale, and we got a little bit of funding. That was the first TV program we studied. We went to a couple of nursery schools and Fred Rogers sent us some tapes of his programs to show the kids. One group watched his show while another group of children was exposed to just nature films. Over a two week period we observed the children at play. We set up a questionnaire so that the observations of our observers (we hired some research assistants) would be impartial, and we gave them a checklist of behaviors to look for in order to get some baseline data on how the children played and what some of the children's skills were. We did this both for the children who weren't going to see Mr. Rogers as well as those who were. Over a two week period the children were shown a half-hour feature of Mr. Rogers every day while the other kids were shown a half-hour nature

feature. At the end of the two week period, we post-tested the children on the same variables and found that they had a completely different set of responses. The children shown Mr. Rogers really performed much more imaginatively than those who did not see him. And that got us on our way! We thought, "Well, we really have something here!" We were shocked to discover how much TV the children were watching; we had no idea the numbers would be so high. I think that it was interesting that in our early studies, the children who were "heavy TV viewers" were watching 3-3.5 hours of television per day, and it seemed to us that that was a great deal of television. That was when we really seriously began looking at television as a factor in children's development.

We found again and again, when we looked at Mr. Rogers' television program among others, that Rogers' program always came out high in producing imagination, especially in boys. That's what was so interesting -- the girls were already playing imaginatively, but boys who were low in imagination improved considerably even after a short exposure to Fred Rogers. That was very gratifying.

TJ: What were some next steps in your research and your goals?

DS: After our first study, in 1981 we felt we needed a larger study We looked at 140 children from different New Haven daycare centers and early childhood centers and followed them over one year.

We had a very mixed group from different socio-economic groups, and that was interesting too because we were curious to see if the effects were stronger in one particular socio economic group compared to another. We had children from very low socio-economic groups to upper class children. We found a significant relation between children's television viewing of violence and their aggressive behavior that we observed in free play at school. One of the things we didn't expect was to see that television would create aggression in children. We had parents keep logs of what the children watched every single day when they were home from school, whether they watched the programs at home or at a friend's house. Did they watch TV alone, or did they watch TV with another friend or sibling or with an adult? We looked at each program from the logs and put them in categories so we identified the different genre of the programs: sports, cartoons, reality shows, variety shows, soap operas. We found thirteen different genres that the children were using to watch TV.

Then when we analyzed the data we found that the children who viewed the most cartoons really were the most aggressive in the daycare centers. We observed the children every day in the centers and rated them on a scale of one to five on twenty-one different variables, all in order to tease out what was really happening in terms of the television programs. Cartoons played a significant role in aggression. We're talking about preschoolers; we're talking about hitting other children, and we made a differentiation between verbal abuse and physical abuse. We found that children who were heavy into cartoons really did hit other children more or used very angry words more when compared to light TV users and especially light cartoon viewers.

Then we decided that one year maybe isn't enough. We did a five-year study tracking boys and girls from ages four to nine. Again we found the same result: the children that watched the most violent programming as preschoolers had the most aggression at age 9 even when controlling for the initial levels of early childhood aggression.

One other effect in that longitudinal study that doesn't get as much publicity was reading scores. We used some standardized tests to look at the children's reading ability, and then five years later, when they were beginning to read, we used standardized tests and found again that children who were heavy into TV were reading less well five years later than children who were very light TV viewers. So TV was having an effect on their reading acquisition, and I think that was a pretty important finding, but it never got the kind of publicity that media violence does.

Parents didn't see that watching TV was really not helping to develop cognitive skills. Parents think, "Okay, I'm going to put my kid in front of TV, he's going to learn a lot of words because people are talking all the time." But that just isn't so. To learn a word, it has to be repeated, it must be defined, it must be used in context. An adult has to point out the word, and when a parent does that, it's amazing that children *can* learn vocabulary from television. Children learn more from mediation. But just sitting there passively, they don't really learn the words. So that was, to us, a very significant finding.

TJ: What were some other surprises along the way?

DS: There were some Kaiser Family Foundation studies that were very important. They found that with children between the ages of eight and eighteen, overall media consumption actually increased over time. They found that, for example, between 2004 and 2009, media consumption among American youth increased, from six hours and 21 minutes to seven hours and 38 minutes per day. TV is easy, you just turn it on, you have to do much more if you're going on the Internet, but, certainly, there's much more music that children are listening to because of the mp3 players and iPods. I remember there was a time when very few children were using these electronic devices but by 2009, 76% of the children between 8 and 18 were using mp3 players and iPods.

Computer use has increased. I think many more children between 2004 and 2009 had increased their laptop ownership, which means kids can carry these devices with them, everywhere. And I certainly saw that at the university where, when we give a lecture, they would all pull out their laptops! And they're typing their notes as you're talking and you can hear the click-click-click in the background which drives me crazy! But as it happens, they all have computers and they're using them.

Video game use has also increased. In the mid-2000s, kids in the Kaiser report between those same ages of 8 and 18 were spending an average of maybe an hour a day using video games but if you look at what's happening now, it increases nearly another 15 minutes per day. And

we begin to wonder, do they create violence among children? And some of the video games are tremendously violent and some of them are very sexually aggressive. Grand Theft Auto is a game where you see this prostitute; she's taken into this car and in this video game they're having sex; you see the car bouncing up and down and then the man throws her out into the street. And this was one of the most popular video games... I don't think I watched the entire thing but I certainly saw excerpts of that.

Brad Bushman, Craig Anderson and other researchers have looked at the effect of video games on children, and they have seen that these games do create violence and aggressive behavior. And you know there was a time when people testified before Congress on these issues. California wanted to ban the sale of video games to children under the age of 18 and that was tossed out of court because of the first amendment. In other words, you can't control the purchasing power of people.

So video games are still for sale and it's up to the parents to preview them and see what the content is in video games before they allow their children to buy them. And by the way, it is the parent who's giving the child the money. Most kids who are very young don't have the kind of money to go to a store to buy the games by themselves, the parents buy the games for them. Parents ought to become a little bit more sophisticated and try and find out what's in this video game before purchasing a game for their child. So I think that video games are one of the contributing factors to the violent and aggressive behavior in children. But as I say, TV is still one of the most important uses. We have internet, we have cellphones, we have smartphones, we have iPads, and now TV is called "Old Media". But what we're saying is that there are more children now using TV. For example, I remember reading that 60% of the young people's TV viewing was by using the actual TV set, but 40% now viewed on mobile devices. So now you don't have to be home to watch TV. You have your iPad, your smartphone and you can watch television anywhere you want to, just with different screens.

TJ: Were you able to study parents at all?

DS: Well, our focus was primarily on the children but we did one study sponsored by Unilever Company where looked at 16 countries and we interviewed over 2250 parents in their own language, using interpreters either personally or on the telephone. One of the questions we were interested in was the amount of television viewing, and also what did children do when they were not in school; what was their favorite pastime? What was fascinating to us was that 72% of the parents, mainly mothers, reported that when the children were not in school, the thing that they did most often was watch television, and that was in 16 different countries around the world, and that was really quite a surprise.

Children weren't going out to play, and we were curious about why they didn't play, so one of the questions was, "Where did children play in your country and if they go to play, is there anyone who goes with them?" We found that many of these countries really didn't have playgrounds available. For example, in a place like Istanbul, in Turkey, these kids didn't have

playgrounds readily available so they went out in the street. I don't know if you've ever been in Istanbul but we've been there. It's so dangerous to walk in the streets, the cars zoom by and many of the parents said they simply didn't want their children outside because of fear of accidents. In Portugal there weren't many playgrounds and Unilever, which has a very strong social responsibility program, decided that perhaps they ought to build some playgrounds, and they did so in a couple of the countries that we were studying.

But even in a place like France or England, children were watching TV more than they were doing play in the playground, and that was really a surprise to us, I mean 72% stating that their favorite activity when they're not in school is watching TV! Reading was very low on the list and that surprised me. Why weren't they reading more? Why weren't they playing more? And yet the parents in some of the other questions said it was very important to them for the children to be out in a playground and that they wanted their children to play. They felt it was healthy and created good social contact, but they couldn't persuade the children and of course for many of the children, parents feared for their safety.

For example, Columbia and Argentina in South America had a very high rate of kidnapping, and parents had a very realistic approach: they didn't want their children outside alone because they feared kidnapping, especially amongst the upper classes. There was some validity to why children didn't go out, but it was shocking to us to see that TV was still the "game of choice," so to speak, using TV rather than playing imaginatively.

Now, obesity is really taking hold in this country; there are more obese children than ever before. Part of it is the diet that we have, with a lot of soft drinks and a lot of fast food, but a lot of it is also the inactivity, not doing enough exercise. Unfortunately many of the schools have taken away the free play period, and they've reduced that time in order to follow the standard core requirements which require teachers to spend more time on teaching math and teaching reading. There's very little free play where kids can just go out and roughhouse it on the playground. If you aren't getting exercise in school and you don't have it when you come home and you're sitting, using your electronic devices, you are going to put on weight. And children really do have very poor diets in this country.

TJ: How far do you feel the field has come along? Do you feel like it's gone in a direction you like to see?

DS: The research has become much more sophisticated; we now have something called meta-analysis, which is a quantitative review of the research on a given topic, in which you look at the results of a number of separate studies and you try to summarize them. There are special meta-analytic techniques, statistical techniques, where you can review all of these studies and find an overall pattern. Many of these meta-analysis studies have looked at the effects of media violence on aggression, and every one of these meta-analyses studies support the hypothesis that exposure to television violence increases the likelihood of subsequent aggression or anti-social behavior.

There was one meta-analysis study that reviewed 67 separate studies, which found a relationship between TV violence and aggression. There was another meta-analysis study that looked at 230 studies, and again the relationship between media violence and aggression was found. So the most recent meta-analysis study that I know of -- and there may have even been one done after that -- by Bushman and Anderson looked at 212 studies of the effects of media violence, and again they found the same result: a significant relationship between viewing violent TV and later aggression. There's probably only one person who doesn't agree with that, that's someone named Christopher Ferguson who feels that there are problems with these meta-analyses. But I'm convinced that the people who have been doing these studies over the years are quite accurate in finding that relationship. It's not the only factor; it would be very naïve of me to say that television is the main factor that causes aggression in our society, that would be nonsense.

Certainly poverty contributes to it, lack of education, the makeup of the family, the lack of parental controls and rules about television viewing, and certainly there may be a predisposition to aggressive behavior, since some children tend to be more aggressive than others. But given all these factors, television is one contributing cause to the aggression in our society and certainly now with the Internet, you can learn how to make a bomb. If you go on some of the social media you see there's a lot of hate material and anti-black material, and anti-semitic material. You can easily see that if you keep being exposed to these hate programs, after a while you begin developing an attitude of hate as that young man did just recently, the one who killed the people in the church. He was absorbed by hate material and he went on the internet and he really gave his whole philosophy about black people. There's a lot of stuff on the Internet that you don't see on TV, that is very explicit about the people they hate and they say it over and over again. So you have to watch what your children look at and be careful that they don't tune in to some of those hateful internet sites.

TJ: What has been your experience in dealing with the surrounding production and policy landscape that your research has informed?

DS: Television in this country is supported by advertising except on Public Television stations. In some other countries, it is not. If an advertiser withdraws his support of a program then there's no more money to support the program, and the producer has to look elsewhere for money. The networks will pull a program off if there's no advertising to keep it going. We've tried to reach out to the industry, and we had many, many meetings with industry people over the years. It was very difficult to convince them that the television program was causing the violence. I remember one particular incident where we were at a television conference and an industry executive got up and said, "You know, television really is a very good thing to have. There was a child who was choking on a candy, and another child in the room had watched TV where he learned the Heimlich maneuver, so he went over to this child and he performed the Heimlich maneuver and he saved that child. Now wasn't that wonderful? He just saw that Heimlich maneuver once on TV and was able to save the child."

So I stood up and I said, “I have a question. You’re telling me that a very positive thing happened just by one exposure. This child saw someone performing the Heimlich maneuver on TV and then when his buddy was swallowing the candy, he was able to save him by copying that. That was only one incident. Now how do you feel about the fact that you’re going to see 50-60 incidents of violence a day? Don’t you think you would copy those 50 or 60 acts of violence when you’re saying that you would copy only one prosocial event?”

He couldn’t answer me, and he said, “Well, I really don’t want to take that question now.” And of course the audience burst out into applause because they saw the point that I was trying to make. The industry is not willing to really curb the violence because they know that these programs are very popular, and the audiences appeal to advertisers. Look at the ratings on Game of Thrones or on any of the police shows: the ratings are very, very high and of course when the ratings are high for a show, the advertisers want to put their ads around that show, because they know a lot of people are looking at it and therefore they’re going to see the advertisers’ product every day, and they’ll buy the product. And it is a successful strategy, there’s no question. If you are watching a favorite program and it’s violent, and those ads are there every single time you watch it, when you need that particular product that’s what comes to mind, the name of that product. So they know that the advertising on TV is going to sell their product. It’s very hard to convince them to not support a violent program. And you know it’s just a money making thing, and I’m sorry to say that, because it’s crass, but that’s what it is. The market is going to lead the way and if the good quiet benign programs don’t have many advertisers, after a while they’re cancelled from TV. And that’s unfortunate. Sex and violence do sell, there’s no question about it.

There’s much more explicit sex on TV today than we have ever seen. At one time in the movies, you’d have to have separate beds for married couples. Now you can see almost pornography in a movie today; there’s explicit sex everywhere in the film and even on TV. Audiences are much more accepting of things that 20 years ago you would not see. And language is much more explicit. Children are hearing words that you would not hear years ago; now people are using four letter words in the films and on television. Probably the only safe station for children today is PBS where they’re very careful about the programs they have for children; they really do monitor them. Not everything on PBS for children is great, but you know that there isn’t going to be any sex stuff or any violence so if your child is watching a PBS program you can be sure that it’s probably okay for him.

This has all encouraged coarse language and the lack of respect for adults. I don’t think children respect their teachers to the extent that we did; our teachers were like gods and goddesses, and we were very careful what we said to them. Now children will make faces at teachers, or slam their books down on their desks, and it’s really rude! Teachers have a hard job today.

TJ: What would you like to see happen in the research?

DS: I would like to see more research done on the uses of the Internet. There is some research coming out now, but we need some longitudinal studies because children are becoming more concrete, they're not doing as much abstract thinking or critical thinking that they used to do and I think that's because everything is right there for them – they go to the Internet and they can get immediate answers. Things are resolved very quickly. I'm concerned that some of the social media networks are creating issues for us in society. If you go on Facebook, people are revealing a great deal about themselves and I think they're going to be sorry that they've done that. Especially if you're a young person and you put stuff on Facebook and then years later you might apply for a job and your boss can check out what you put on Facebook. People are really much more self-revealing than they have been. Do you really need 200 friends on Facebook? Maybe you need one good friend in reality. It's a false assumption that by having all of these so-called friends on Facebook that you're making good friendships, I don't think that's true. I think that you're becoming more isolated and really don't know how to work at a friendship. You don't work at a friendship through the Internet you work at a friendship in a real life situation where you talk to that person, you see them face to face, you have numerous encounters with that person and it's not through Facebook. And I think that's something that our children need to learn and something we need to study more.

Also, we need to explore what's happening to our kids in terms of their morals and values. So far we haven't really looked at the values of children. What are your moral attitudes and what are your values? We need to be looking at Facebook users and social network users compared to children that don't use the Internet -- it's going to be hard to match children that don't use all of these internet devices, but I think it's important to study that, and I'd like to see more funding, which by the way is drying up. It's very hard to get good funding, especially from the government, for media studies. We have to go to private foundations and they're still more interested in sex, violence, and obesity rather than morality, values, and relationships. But I think those are the things that make our country strong, when we have respect for each other, and I think we need to study those much more.

Another thing that bothers me is this catharsis notion. Many people say to me "Okay but if you watch a lot of TV and you see a lot of violence, won't that cure you? You won't be so violent because you've seen it on TV? In other words, you're draining off all that violent energy by watching it." Well, most of the research supports the opposite effect. Over 40-50 years of research, we haven't found any catharsis. Watching the violence does not drain you of violence, it makes you more violent. And I can relate that to the bullying and the courtyard. You know, a bully hits a child, and you punish the bully and you think he's not going to do it again, but the bullying continues because he gets a secondary kind of result from that. Not only does he feel very strong because he knocked someone down but he can do it again and it makes him feel good again and again. So it doesn't drain him. The more he hits, the more you may think "Okay, he's going to drain it out; he won't hit anymore." But it isn't true. The more he hits, the more he wants to hit, because he does get a secondary effect. He's reinforced by knocking somebody down; it doesn't drain him of the energy to be a bully, he just keeps on being a bully. So this catharsis notion that some people have is false. People may say, "Look I watch a lot of

TV and violence and therefore, it's draining me of my own violent energies." And I have to say no, the research is just the opposite. The more violence you watch, the more likely you are to become desensitized to the violence. Just like some of the shooters, especially the shooters that came to the schools and killed some of the children – they were heavy into TV viewing, and it did not drain away their desire to shoot. If anything, it reinforced their desire to kill. So I am not convinced about catharsis, it doesn't seem to work and I think that it's very important for people to understand that. The research clearly shows that if you watch violent TV, that's not going to make you less violent. It tends to make you more aggressive.

TJ: What advice do you have for us, Dorothy?

DS: For very young children you have to set a pattern quite early. You don't just turn on the TV and go away. Some of the solutions that we've looked at over the years are called mediation, where parents who really talk to their children about TV and set rules. For example, if you take your child to the doctor, you prepare your child, you say "We're going to the doctor, he's going to use this funny looking instrument called a stethoscope, he's going to put it on your heart and you're going to get a bump, bump, bump sound." In other words, you tell your child everything that's going to happen so that when he gets to the doctor he doesn't feel as scared or nervous because he knows what to expect. And that's what we call mediation. It's a parent who does a lot of talking to their children and explaining things, and many parents don't want to do that but it takes an effort to keep preparing their child for anything. But it really does reduce the anxiety. And in that way, I think that a parent that is a mediator regarding TV is someone who sits with the child and when the program is over says "Okay, let's talk about that program. Do you understand what was happening? Why do you think it ended the way it did? What do you think so-and-so could have done so that this wouldn't have happened?" In other words, it's talking to your children. It takes a lot of effort on the part of the parent to be a mediator.

We've looked into parents that were heavy into mediation and low into mediation. We had researchers go into the homes of the children that were the most aggressive kids in our study, and the researchers were like flies on the wall. We chose a sample of about 35 children and we had researchers go in the afternoon when the children came home from school and record everything the child did, everything the mother did, then we had another group of researchers who came in in the evening when the father was home and again like flies on the wall, the researchers record everything that happened between mother, father and child. We found that the parents who were the most mediators, who really discussed things with their children, compared to parents who didn't, really produced children who were less aggressive and much more congenial.

When I talk about mediation here's an example of what we found: the child would come home and the non-mediating mother would say "Okay, change your clothes, do your homework, and remember we're having supper at 6:00." The mediating parent would say when the child would come home, this is an example: "Hi, what did you do today? Tell me what happened in school and what are your plans for this afternoon? And wait a minute, look out the window, look at that, I see a bird on the tree!" In other words, the mother was interacting with the child after

school and doing a lot of mediation, and we found that many parents don't do that. It's just "Hi, hello, change your clothes go out and play," rather than "Let's sit down and have a talk about what happened today." Mediation means effort on the part of the parent, but it does pay off. We found those parents that were the good mediators, who did a lot of talking with their children, had children that were performing much better on all kinds of tests that we gave. So my advice would be: Talk, talk, talk to your children! Read to them at night, read a story before they go to bed, don't let them watch TV and then put them to bed. Talk about the TV programs you see, set rules about the number of hours you can watch TV, preview the programs your children watch so that you are sure that it is safe and good for them. If you do that early on, by the time your child is 10, 12, 13, you know that you have a child who is much more discriminating about the kind of TV that he or she will watch than a child who never had that mediating exposure.

TJ: Your attention seems to be shifting over time to look at more cognitive issues, which are probably more elusive in terms of research. Do you think that's a fair observation?

DS: In the early 1981 study, we did look at some of the cognitive aspects. We did look at reading and at vocabulary and we did find that children who were good players for example, played more imaginatively, used more nouns, used more future tense verbs, they used the subjunctive more. We did look at language, we looked at heavy TV viewing and language and I think that what we found was that as children play, the reason they use more future tense is because they have a sense of ordering. For example, if playing tea party, they would say "First we have to do this: set the table, boil water, then make cookies" so they had a sense of the future and they were using more future tense: "We'll do this, then we will do that, and then we will do this" and they were using many, many, many more words because for example if they were playing pirates and they didn't know the word for "eyepatch" they would ask their mother or a teacher or a sibling "What's that thing that you put on your eye?" So we did find that their vocabulary was much stronger in the children who were lighter TV viewers and who played imaginatively than children who were heavy TV viewers. Because in play you do use words more and you do use the subjunctive. What will that be, it would be, it could be. So that was very interesting. So we were looking at the cognitive aspect of television.

I think what happened though, is that the violence aspect got more publicity than the cognitive aspects of that research, because that's a more sexy variable. But no, early on we had looked at language acquisitions and we found that you just can't sit passively in front of TV. For example, we did ten studies of "Barney and Friends" and one of the things that is very interesting is the vocabulary. We found that when the characters on "Barney and Friends" explained a word or gave an example of a word the children tended to learn the word more readily than if it was just said. For example, if they said the word "nest," they said that a nest is like a little house that a bird builds out of straw or mud and lives there. The children were more likely to understand the word nest when it was explained than if they just said "Here, it's a nest!" So that was very important to the Barney and Friends producers because in the future programs they began explaining their vocabulary. Indeed, in our ten studies we found that the children who watched "Barney and Friends" were exposed to the definitions, and they learned

more vocabulary than children who did not see the program. It's very important that programs really do use big words and try to give them a tag, to try and explain the word. And then the child is going to understand the word. So in our "Barney and Friends" studies, that was very important. Even in prosocial behavior, when they would say "Okay, let's share this," they had to explain what sharing meant. "Let's take turns," and then they would explain taking turns. So the explanations of the words are very important on TV, and of course if the mother sits there, that's what you hope she will do. But many times children are watching TV without a parent there, so if the characters on TV can do some of the explaining, it really is very useful. So TV can be a very good teacher if you give explanations of what you are doing.

TJ: Yes, TV is a great teacher -- how can it be a better teacher? Your research has really pointed the way.

DS: Those "Barney and Friends" studies helped us clarify our thinking and showed very clearly that when the characters explained a social event or a cognitive event or an emotional event, the children grasped the information very quickly. We did some studies, for example, for the National Geographic on a wild animal series, and one of the things we had asked the scientists to do was to explain or show a picture of the event or talk about it, for example using maps, and that was very important. If you talked about an animal, make sure you showed a picture of the animal or his habitat. In other words, just don't say "they're alligators," show us an alligator, tell us what an alligator does, tell us where the alligator lives. And that's why that series was so good because the writers tried to explain things very thoroughly.

I think our later work really moved on to the mediation of television, of TV as a teacher by using mediation on TV, knowing that the parents aren't going to be sitting there. So that was the latest part of our work.

TJ: How would you summarize the milestones in your work?

DS: Starting with the early studies with play and imagination, moving on to the cognitive results, then the prosocial behaviors, and then moving on to the fact that TV can be a teacher through the mediation. If we were still doing research, I would study how the Internet is affecting our thought processes and especially our ability to do critical and abstract thinking. Are we losing that ability to do abstract thinking? Are kids becoming much more concrete and less imaginative because everything is spelled out for them on TV or the Internet? And that's where I think we see a real gap.

TJ: Are there any other holes that you feel need to be filled?

DS: We need more longitudinal studies, as a whole. They're expensive to do but I think they pay off in the end, to follow children over a long period of time. We have lab studies, which are easy to do. But I'd really like to see more longitudinal studies where you can follow children over the course of one, two, or three years and measure what the media are doing over time.

It's very expensive and time consuming. But it really is the way to go because we are being bombarded by different electronic devices every day, and we really need to know what they're doing to us over time.

We were one of the first ones to prepare a curriculum on teaching critical use of TV years ago, and it was used in a hundred schools across the country. We pre- and post- tested the kids and found that children exposed to the curriculum learned more about how TV was produced, and they reduced their violent behavior. After a while the schools dropped it and other literacy efforts came in, but this was one of the first ones teaching children how to use television critically and it was for fourth, fifth and sixth graders. We followed through preparing curricula for high school children and even for kindergartners. All children were pre- and post- tested suggesting that the use of a TV curriculum helped children to understand the material better than children who did not have such exposure to lessons about television.

We were pioneers in the media literacy education field, and I didn't even talk about that! I do hope children are learning about electronic media in the schools today so that they may become critical viewers.



Get Ready for Media Literacy Week!

Canada has been doing this for 10 years and we're finally catching on! The first U.S. Media Literacy Week is scheduled for November 2-6. Hosted by NAMLE and its media literacy partners, the week will include activities around the country. CML will be posting a list of events for Southern California, or visit the [official web site](#) for more information.



Have You Liked Us on Facebook?

Stay up to date with articles and reports, as well as exciting events for Media Literacy Week.



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 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

Voices of Media Literacy

Find all 21 interviews on the **CML website**. Pioneers include (in alphabetical order): Neil Andersen (Canada); Cary Bazalgette (UK); David Buckingham (UK); Marilyn Cohen (US); David Considine (US); Barry Duncan (Canada); Jean Pierre Golay (US); Renee Hobbs (US); Douglas Kellner (US); Robert Kubey (US); Len Masterman (UK); Barrie McMahaon (Australia); Kathryn (Kate) Moody (US); Renee Cherow-O'Leary (US); James Potter (US); Robyn Quin (Australia); Marieli Rowe (US); Dorothy Singer (US); Elizabeth Thoman (US); Kathleen Tyner (US); and Chris Worsnop (Canada).

Free Global OnRamp Resources

If you haven't visited the section in our store called Global OnRamp Resources then today is the day. **Free resources** in a variety of languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, Arabic, Korean) can be downloaded to help you learn the basics and get started in the classroom. [Visit now](#).

Reality TV and Media Literacy

CML's Tessa Jolls was interviewed for this article recently published by *Variety*. The need for media literacy is growing on a daily basis.

<http://variety.com/2015/voices/columns/donald-trump-media-campaign-reality-tv-1201603398/>

MediaLit Moments

Editing Reality

This is an exciting time for media and media literacy. There is no limit to the material available for AHA moments. Reality TV shows and famous individuals are available to be watched, tweeted, posted, and downloaded every minute of every day. But how do we know what's really real? Is "reality" editable?

Ask students to decide what they would edit from their own Reality TV show.

AHA! Reality shows are being presented as real, but they are edited and constructed for an audience.

Key Question #1: Who created this message?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed

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

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

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

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

Grade level: 6-9

Activity: Review the articles below before starting this activity with your students. You might want to bring in a clip of a popular Reality TV show (Kardashians, Biggest Loser, Apprentice...) that you determine to be appropriate for your class. Ask your students which Reality TV shows they watch and why? Do they believe what they see? Do they think the shows are scripted or planned out in advance? Do they enjoy the conflict between characters? Why is there so much conflict?

Next, share the information from the articles and ask students if they would want their own lives edited if they were on Reality TV. What parts of their lives would they edit and why? Would they hand over control to a producer to edit their lives for an audience? Why do producers edit the shows? Do reality stars have the right to complain about how they are presented?

<http://www.rd.com/culture/13-secrets-reality-tv-show-producers-wont-tell-you/>

<http://variety.com/2015/voices/columns/donald-trump-media-campaign-reality-tv-1201603398/>

<http://www.tvguide.com/news/reality-shows-editing-interview-1032146/>

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.