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Theme: Globalization

The Ofcom International Forum on Media Literacy Research

The UK Office of Communications held the first International Media Literacy Research Forum on May 14th through 16th which was attended by scholars, practitioners and government representatives from nearly two dozen countries across the globe. Ofcom, as the Office is known, convened the forum to move media literacy “up the international policy agenda” and to share learning about emerging issues at a global level. Ofcom also intends to give the forum a permanent web presence to provide a showcase for new research.

Ofcom is the regulatory body for radio, television and all electronic media in the United Kingdom. Several years ago, Parliament imposed statutory duties on Ofcom to include media education in its priorities for action, but Ofcom has also embraced media education as a necessary complement to its regulatory activities. In its own statement of strategy and priorities for media literacy, the Office notes, “In an increasingly converged communications world, people face greater media choice,” and observes that those choices also create responsibilities, especially for parents to better understand the media their children consume, so they can help them make the best choices for themselves.

Ofcom’s current media literacy activities emphasize research because their educational mandate is relatively recent, and the Office hopes to draw on a base of evidence to help define priorities for future projects. Through the research forum and its website, Ofcom also hopes to keep track of emerging literacy issues at home and around the world. Ofcom has conducted two media literacy “audits” in the United Kingdom, with the most recent audit released in tandem with website coverage of the research forum. Utilizing Ofcom’s own definition of media literacy, the audit focuses on the ability of children and adults to “access, understand and create” media. Highlights include the results of the audit’s demographic studies. Five common groups of media users were identified: engaged, pragmatists (who are more functionally oriented in their use of media), economisers (whose use is limited by cost), hesitant, and resisters. Given the results of the study, Ofcom will need to refine its approach for users 65 and over, who constitute a majority of “hesitant” and “resisters,” and for users from lower socioeconomic groups under the age of 35, who constitute the majority of “economisers.”

At the research forum, Robin Blake, head of media literacy programs for Ofcom, gave a presentation which incisively encapsulated some of the motivations for media literacy research: to find ways to better serve the underprivileged and disenfranchised, to find ways of



reaching at-risk youth, and ways of engaging reluctant learners; to help protect consumers against the more corrosive effects of media; and to promote critical understanding to help citizens become more discerning consumers of media. Blake also outlined some of the more salient outcomes of media literacy research: to inform policy (Ofcom's primary responsibility); to influence market development (i.e., to address the needs and preferences of consumers); to generate educational projects and evaluation of projects which can empower the public; and to make use of evaluations of those projects to disseminate the tools, knowledge and strategies to help consumers better express themselves in all forms of media.

Among the American delegates to the forum, Lynda Bergsma of the National Association for Media Literacy Education gave a presentation which reviewed 28 published evaluations of practical media literacy interventions designed to improve the ability of youth to improve their choices regarding health issues. Read abstracts <http://www.ofcom.org.uk/forum/abstracts>

Of the European delegates, Patrick Verniers discussed the European Charter for Media Literacy (www.euromedialiteracy.eu), an organization designed to attract a multinational membership committed to promoting core principles of media literacy. The organization also has undertaken an international series of academic conferences which focus on topics ranging from youth media production to best practices for media literacy instruction outside of the school setting.

One European delegate, Jordi Torrent of Spain, was also affiliated with the United Nations, and discussed the Alliance of Civilizations (www.unaoc.org) an organization which promotes open discussion of international issues, particularly between Western and Middle Eastern nations (The organization website is published in English, Spanish, and Arabic). The flagship program of the Alliance is the Ready Response Mechanism, a service provided by the website which assists journalists writing about international crises by directing them to experts in relevant subject areas who will make themselves available for interviews. The goal of the program is to stop the circulation of harmful media stereotypes about world conflicts, and to promote rational dialogue in its place. The organization also acts as a user-generated clearinghouse of information on four specific topics: youth, education, media, and migration. Torrent is the organization's project manager for media literacy education, and explains that the Alliance--while not a media literacy organization in itself--provides support for media education, particularly for youth, by directing users to relevant source material, organizations, and events.

The Consortium for Media Literacy's own contribution to the forum, "Global/Local: Media Literacy and the Global Village," directly addressed the topic of the globalized nature of media consumption and production, and revealed how the use of a common set of tools for learning about media can lead to positive social change across the world. The paper, authored by Tessa Jolls (CEO of the Center for Media Literacy and Co-Founder of the Consortium), Mary Ann Sund (Co-Founder of the Consortium), and Barbara Walkosz (Associate Professor of Communications, University of Colorado, Denver) begins with a discussion of the opportunities and constraints inherent in a globalized media environment. The identity of the Millennial generation is being formed in large part by omnipresent media which act as both teacher and parent. Real-time, flesh and blood parents are challenged to assert their own values in the face of the embedded values and points of view contained in the media messages received by their children. While local consumers may be saturated with media messages from around the globe, they still respond to media in uniquely individual ways, or, as some postmodernist

scholars tell us, audiences will “negotiate” the meaning of any mediated text. As the authors assert, local communities can and do play a vital role in the way that media messages are received and ‘negotiated.’ Media educators can help people in the local “village” respond to the many dispatches received from the “global village” with greater critical awareness. With practice, parents, children, teachers and other community members develop the ability to determine which media messages they wish to value and circulate.

As individual consumers, people may live on a light or heavy media diet, but as the authors remind us, everyone has to make a living in a global economy, in which global media play an integral role. Standards for media literacy education, including a framework of concepts for inquiry, should be adopted in the curriculum of any country. As more people begin to adopt a common set of tools for accessing, analyzing, evaluating and creating media, they are likely to become informed citizens who add their voices to public debates. As they make their voices heard around the world, they will also be contributing to the rise of a global democratic culture.

In her presentation to the conference, Tessa Jolls also unveiled a revised and expanded learning framework, Questions/Tips (Q/TIPS™), which includes a series of questions for producers as well as for consumers. The explanations which accompany the new questions help learners to conceptualize the process they are about to undertake as they set out to create--and not just negotiate--meaning in media texts of their own making. This expanded framework is designed in part to capture the attention of the many learners who are already becoming skilled in using social networking sites. By introducing the framework at the forum, the authors also hope that an increasing number of learners across the world will engage with it to truly become active participants in a “Globalocal” village!

View the presentation by clicking www.ofcom.uk/theforum/coverage

Research Highlights

Children and New Technology Byron Review Released

In fall 2007, the UK Office of Communications (Ofcom) commissioned an official report on “children and new technology” in response to increasing levels of public concern about the online safety of children. The team formed to draft this report was headed by child psychologist Tanya Byron. Byron and her team conducted a thorough investigation, including an academic literature review, an in-depth focus group of a diverse sample of parents and children, and calls for evidence from parents, children, industry, government and NGOs.

Perhaps the most important of Byron’s findings was that even the most educated of parents may find that their children’s knowledge of new and emerging technologies far outstrips their own, and that generally, a Digital Divide separates many parents from their children.

According to the evidence that Byron and her team collected, the unfamiliarity of parents with their children’s consumption of electronic media sometimes leads them to oscillate wildly between permissive and over-controlling attitudes. Byron, in her report, encouraged parents to participate alongside their children in some of their favorite activities with electronic media. As Byron suggests, understanding something of the digital terrain which their children are treading will help parents make more appropriate decisions about their children’s use of new technologies.

In addition, Byron issues a call for the British government to create a single website which could serve as a “one stop shop” source of support for parents, one which could help parents find anything from local internet tutorials and online discussions with experts and other parents, to sources about industry labeling of products, as well as sources on purchase and set up of parental controls for computers and games consoles.

Vulnerability of Early Adolescents

The report raises some concerns about the vulnerability of children between the ages of 11 and 14, and identifies this as one of the most crucial times for parents to discuss issues of online risk with their children. According to the evidence collected by Byron’s team, children at this age are not only learning how to use the new technologies to their advantage, but are also using the online world for their own development -- to explore their identities, to satisfy needs for independence, for social interaction, and even for risk-taking itself. Yet their ability to critically evaluate information and to make appropriate decisions in social interactions is only beginning to emerge. Ironically, most parents begin to pay increased attention to their children’s internet use at the end of this period, or into the secondary period of adolescence. Byron’s findings about the vulnerability of early adolescents leads her to make an explicit call for intervention, recommending that government should enforce statutory labeling of console and online games for children at ages of “12+,” with fines and other penalties for violation.

The recent PBS Frontline documentary “Growing Up Online” featured one commentator who sounded this note of alarm: “It’s really hard to control what our kids are doing online. What we have here is kind of the New Wild West. Nobody’s really in charge.” In her own final

summary, Byron reaches a different conclusion: “The sphere of new media is sometimes described as being like the ‘Wild West’---a landscape populated by cynical, selfish characters with no regard for the welfare of children. I have not found this to be the case. Throughout the internet and video games industries, Government and regulators, the law enforcement community, the charitable and voluntary sector, and the world of education and children’s services there are countless individuals committed to supporting children and parents to deal with the risks that new technologies may present.”

Operating from this assumption, Byron devotes most of the report to recommending ways in which all these stakeholders (but especially parents and industry representatives) can be “joined up” to effectively improve the online safety of children.

Teach Children to Swim

Byron also offers a countervailing image by comparing the online world to a public swimming pool:

- Where the swimming pool has safety notices, a website might have an acceptable use policy.
- Just as the swimming pool provides swimming aids, online service providers can tailor their services to younger users. For example, a social networking site might have higher default privacy settings for children.
- Instead of providing different pool areas, in the online space we have content filters, safe search options and age verifications to direct children away from unsuitable areas of the internet.
- In place of lifeguards, online services have moderators and notice and take down procedures to enforce acceptable use policies.
- Instead of fences, doors, locks and alarms, parents can use parental control software to monitor children’s activity, set time limits for usage and ‘lock’ safe search on content filtering settings on.

Finally, Byron writes, “Children are children and . . . will take risks for different reasons. Risk taking is a developmental imperative of childhood. We know that there are also cases where children will get through locked doors, climb fences, ignore safety signs and jump into waters that are too deep for them and in some tragic cases drown. For this reason, we also teach children how to swim.”

While Byron does not devote much of her report to the subject of media literacy, she makes it clear that media literacy education is the key to swimming in the online “waters.”

Geena Davis Institute Launches PSA Contest for Increased Awareness of Gender Disparities in Media

When Oscar-winning actress Geena Davis sat down to watch television with her two-year-old in 2004, they both began to notice something: most of the characters they saw on the small screen were men and boys.

Davis approached the Annenberg School of Communications at USC to inquire about the possibility of conducting gender analyses of contemporary TV and film, with a focus on media

produced for children. Dismayed by the results of the four studies released by Annenberg School, she founded the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDIGM) in the hope of bringing an argument for improved representation of girls and women in children's entertainment to a broad audience that could include parents, children, academics, and producers.

The first GDIGM conference was held in January 2008. Scholars from around the world, critics, producers, and high school seniors from two teen girls' organizations (Teen Voices and WriteGirl) spoke out on the female characters they would like to see on children's television programming, and they shared their visions of the women they would like to become in the fields of activism, politics, journalism and broadcasting.

Since the conference, GDIGM has launched a video PSA contest open to males and females, ages 13 to 26. Contestants are asked to produce a short video in which they offer their own creative commentary on the results of the Annenberg research. The Institute consulted with CML in helping contestants prepare their submissions. The contest guidelines include a link to detailed explanations of CML's *Five Key Questions and Core Concepts* for Consumers and Producers to help prospective contestants come up with a concept for their video production, as well as a link to a checklist to help contestants evaluate their work prior to submission. For more information on the contest, visit thegeenadavisinstitute.com. Contestants have a chance to win a three day trip to Los Angeles and meet with a Hollywood producer, or win \$3,500 in cash!

Med!aLit moments

Introducing MediaLit Moments!

We are pleased to introduce a series of MediaLit Moments – short clips and/or activities that provide teachable ‘AHA’ moments to illustrate one of the *Five Key Questions* for media literacy.

Designed for ease of use in the classroom, MediaLit Moments require limited preparation and are easily downloadable. Take a look at this month’s MediaLit Moment: *Who is renting my eyeballs?* (see page 10)

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.

Media Literacy Resources

Tip of the month: To teach, one must first understand. Teachers interested in media literacy need to explore and internalize for themselves the Five Core Concepts of media literacy. This foundation, in turn, provides the ability to convey and illuminate the Five Key Questions for students. Applying the Five Key Questions then gives students the tools with which to negotiate meaning for themselves.

Featured sites in this issue:

[Alliance of Civilizations](#)

[Consortium for Media Literacy](#)

[Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media](#)

[Ofcom](#)

Express Yourself! We invite you to write your Congressional representative to express the need for media literacy education in our schools www.house.gov/writerep

Med!aLit Moments

Who is renting my eyeballs?

The Product Placement Counting Game

Product placement is an increasingly common practice whereby advertisers pay media makers to use or display their products as props in movies, television shows and video games. Here's a "teachable moment" to help students recognize who is renting their eyeballs when they watch their favorite shows or movies.

Have students count product placements in media programs: TV shows, videogames, social networking sites all provide great resources.

AHA! My media is full of hidden advertisements. I'm being influenced without realizing it! And sometimes these product placements affect how the story is being told...the advertisers are renting my eyeballs and often, I'm paying them for the privilege!

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

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

Grade Level: 3 – 12

Materials: Video or DVD of a current film, videogame or television clip appropriate to your age group that contains multiple product placements, DVD/VCR player, paper or chalk board, internet access.

Resources: <http://www.brandchannel.com/> tracks product placements in the week's number one film and includes archives from past years.

Activity: Have the students talk about advertising in general. What were some examples of products? Where do you see most advertisements? How do you know if you are viewing an ad? When you see the specific name of a product being used in a TV show or movie, do you consider that an ad? Why or why not? Have you ever heard the term "product placement?"

Show the media piece or the video clip twice. First, watch it without stopping or commenting. Then look at it again and have students note (or call out) when they recognize a specific product being used. List all products on the board in front of the class. How many products did the students count?

Guiding Questions for additional discussion: How can viewers know when a product is used for artistic or narrative reasons and when it is simply a paid product placement? Who benefits from product placements and who is hurt by it? Is it unethical if money is paid for an ad that is never identified as advertising? Why are product placements not listed at the end of a TV show or movie? Are there times when product placements are useful or helpful?

Have the students go online to media industry web sites to see examples and read how the industry describes product placements.

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, © 2002-2008, Center for Media Literacy, www.medialit.com