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## Theme: The History of Media Literacy

When is a field of study officially acknowledged as a “discipline”? We’re not used to asking that question in an era in which universities offer courses in a hundred or more different departments. Yet the question is a pressing one for the field of media literacy education, which has never had a consistently visible presence in academia. Generally, recognition occurs when publications, especially peer-reviewed publications, draw on sources widely acknowledged by expert opinion as primary documents in the field.

Media literacy educators and advocates can end up inhabiting the role of “lay public” when it comes to defining their own field of endeavor. They’ve created fun, innovative and effective curricula and programs, but the crush of day-to-day responsibilities leaves little room for them to document their contributions to media literacy education as a separate field worthy of attention. Just documenting the history of a single non-profit organization may take more commitment than its members can bear.

In 2011 CML made its contribution to the recognition of media literacy as a valid field of inquiry with its [Voices of Media Literacy](#) project. Since her retirement in 2007, CML founder Elizabeth Thoman has been boxing, labeling, cataloguing and storing 30 years’ worth of documents. The culmination of her efforts—the 2013 deposition of the Elizabeth Thoman Media Literacy Archive at the Harrington School of Communication at the University of Rhode Island--represents nothing less than a groundbreaking achievement.

In September 2013 media literacy educators and students converged on the URI campus to attend a symposium to honor Thoman and to address the “Historical Roots of Media Literacy.” Conference organizers were pleasantly surprised to find that they had registered twice the number of expected attendees. Items from the Elizabeth Thoman Media Literacy Archive were made available for inspection, and they proved to be a popular attraction. Tessa Jolls, CML President and CEO observed: “People were impressed at being able to touch these pieces of history. For example, they really liked being able to handle the original Grunwald Document [a seminal UNESCO document calling for worldwide implementation of media literacy education]. They were able to get a first-hand feel for different events and personalities. Liz also had set out collections of teaching materials from the era, and people really enjoyed seeing these formative documents that had been created by teachers.”

For more information, you can visit the WordPress blog site devoted to the event: <http://historyofml.wordpress.com/dedication-of-the-thoman-archive/>

In addition, NAMLE conducted a pre-symposium Google Hangout with Michael RobbGrieco, Tessa Jolls, NAMLE President Sherri Hope Culver and other notable conference participants. Video of this Hangout can be found [here](#).

The Grunwald Document may also be accessed at the CML site:

<http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/challenge-media-education-grunwald-document>

In this issue of *Connections*, we focus the spotlight on the National Telemedia Council, a media literacy organization with a long, rich history dating back to the 1930s. In our interview with NTC Executive Director Marieli Rowe and President Karen Ambrosh, Rowe offers lively, well-drawn memories of past events, while Ambrosh contextualizes organizational and movement milestones and details future plans for teacher education. In our News section, we report on events held in honor of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NTC at the University of Wisconsin earlier this month. And in our MediaLit Moment, your middle and high school social studies students will discover widely different sketches of the first Thanksgiving served on Twitter, and will have the chance to assess their credibility and point of view.

## Research Highlights

### Sixty Years of Media Education at the National Telemedia Council: Interview

Names alone can tell part of the history of an organization: Wisconsin Association for Better Radio Listening (mid-1930s), American Council for Better Broadcasts (1953), and now the National Telemedia Council (1983). With its uninterrupted history, the National Telemedia Council is the oldest ongoing media literacy organization in the United States. Jessie McCanse and Leslie Spence, the founders of ACBB, are credited as founding members of NTC. This year NTC has been celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with award events, video-cast conversations on media literacy, and participation in a regional “media literacy week” (For more, read our article in CML News).

Recently we caught up with NTC Executive Director Marieli Rowe and President Karen Ambrosh to discuss the history of the organization and to ask questions about current and future plans.

CML: What has changed and what has remained the same between founder Jessie McCanse’s goals for the organization and yours now?

Marieli Rowe (MR): The same principles on which we’ve always been based. They’re very important, and have sustained us for 60 years or more.

Karen Ambrosh (KA): Marieli gave a speech about this at the Symposium on the Historical Roots of Media Literacy at the University of Rhode Island. We’re dedicated to collaboration as opposed to competition, and we take a positive, non-judgmental approach to media. We work with producers, and not against them. We’re dedicated to open dialogue and interaction.

MR: We have a firm belief in the highest ethical rigor in everything we do. What hasn’t changed that makes us stand out is our interest in having conversations about media. In the 1930s Jessie McCanse began forming study groups to discuss radio programs. With TV she developed programs where she asked people to get together in groups and come up with their own criteria for what makes a good program. It’s a distinction that we made in the presentation as well—we’ve never made a checklist or passed around how-to’s. . . The word “study” keeps coming up again and again in our organizational history—to study what are the criteria for evaluation and assessment. People need to develop their own criteria, or else they’ll become robots. They need to learn how to develop critical thinking skills, and to have critical autonomy.

CML: What may have changed?

KA: Projects and emphases have changed. A good 30 to 40 years was focused on the annual project. That began with the Look, Listen, Evaluate Survey, which was circulated to homes, classes, adult groups, and more. They’d submit their responses and analysis to NTC, which

would be compiled into an annual survey given to broadcasters. The surveys were also distributed to the FCC and Congressional committees, to try to show them what people were thinking. It made it real for kids and people doing the survey—knowing that their work would be shared with producers and with people in charge of what’s on the air—that it wasn’t just a classroom exercise. That’s sort of where we’re headed today. . . The Journal [The *Journal of Media Literacy*] was our focus for a long time. As production gets more challenging—we’re now producing just one or two depending on the year—we’ve been complementing the journal with a media café or conversation that brings the ideas of the journal to life. It’s also what the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary has been about this year. We’ve been bringing classrooms to share their work with media literacy, and having experts analyze and respond, and have a conversation about where media literacy is going. And for the kids, their projects are seen by a larger audience, which gives them more meaning and takes them to a different level of importance.

CML: Your latest brochure mentions that you’ve convened national media literacy conferences from 1953 to 1999. What have been the main concerns on the minds of media literacy educators as they attended during those years? What have been some of the more memorable conferences and why?

MR: Traditionally it’s been very difficult for teachers to find others working in the field. They’ve been pretty isolated. The conferences were a way for bringing teachers together to share what they were doing. Also, the conferences were not always aimed at teachers. Some were strictly for kids.

KA: In the early years, we held conferences in collaboration with other organizations, like the National Association of Educational Broadcasters.

MR: They used to convene their conferences at Ohio State, and we used one day of their conference for our “day.” It was wonderful being able to access major thinkers and leaders in the field. We worked with academics from Columbia, from Louisiana State, and other places. Those conferences were held for 28 years in Columbus until 1978 or 1979. . .After that, we would get one of our members to sponsor the conference. We held them at the University of Dayton. We held one in Los Angeles in 1980 at the USC Annenberg School for Communication, and there were some FCC Commissioners who came. So often it wasn’t just for teachers. Generally we had them so that people could understand media better, and to bring media professionals together with the general public.

MR: In 1981 we had a conference in Washington DC where we brought children from Kids-4, another project of ours. Kids-4 is a local television channel in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin that’s run by and for children, and it’s still running. It started in 1978, and was sponsored by us until it could get on its own feet. We brought them out as a media literacy showcase. Not only were the kids the talent, they were also the producers, writers, interviewers, and tech crew. They ran a joint satellite broadcast with kids who were in Brisbane, Australia. It was a really exciting and pioneering thing to do at the time. It was so much fun watching this kid up on a Cox Cable

truck switching the satellite back forth—a little 12 year-old kid doing that! . . .It was a great example of kids doing their own TV. We did have teachers involved in running the program, one particularly focusing on the basic concepts of media literacy, though not as well-articulated as what we have now—they were still in the process of formation. If you had to create it, you also had to know the audience, and know what you wanted to show to them. You had to realize that what you were showing was not reality but a representation.

CML: What have been some of your most effective programs and why?

KA: The Look, Listen, Evaluate project was the longest-running, and it had 10,000 participants at one point. We've got an amazing archive for the program, and we'd like to get it digitized. We have polls of surveys. It's really a history of television, with people revealing the programs they've watched. There's great commentary on *The Dukes of Hazzard*, *My Mother the Car*. It's a great survey of TV history, and there are people who would love to have it.

MR: There's a town somewhere in California, a pretty small town, where we had 7,000 participants. That was in the 1950s. It was a way of creating active participation. The hope was that through this kind of evaluation and teaching people to look for quality, we could change the mindset of broadcasters to provide programming of more substance, and not just the cheap stuff. There may have been some success at that.

MR: We had a newsletter that started as a 4-page thing to keep people apprised of current events, and that became what is now the *Journal of Media Literacy*. The *Journal of Media Literacy* is a very big contribution to the field. It's very difficult to maintain in print form. As we go forth, we should also have it available online, but we should not stop the print edition. My feeling is that there is a permanence to the printed page that will never go away. In the meanwhile, there are some innovative things we're doing to push the envelope. We've been developing online courses for teachers. One of the really great needs in media literacy is teacher education. Karen and her colleague Kate are putting a course together.

KA: We plan to build a network of teachers by providing an online space. We'll offer teachers the tools they need, the education, and the space where it can live inside of a course. We're still debating the connections we should seek with Wisconsin institutions of higher learning. We're thinking of Edgewood College and the University of Wisconsin, Madison Department of Public Instruction. We do want to address what teachers need for licensure.

MR: The Wisconsin Institute for New Media Education is providing what teachers need, which is a challenge the *Journal* has been faced with on a regular basis. We are not an academic, peer-reviewed journal, and we don't solely have an audience of PhDs. We want the *Journal* to be readable by academics, practicing teachers, and by anyone interested in the field. When you open it up in that way, however, it makes it difficult to provide access for all those different groups and to provide the articles and information they need.

KA: As a teacher, I've struggled with the *Journal* at times. It's usually devoted to academics. It's not a quick and easy read, and it's not about what I can do with kids in the classroom tomorrow. It's wrapped in theory and practice combined. That's why we've started these media cafés, to break it down and make it real. . .how they can use this. With WINME, teachers have support from each other. They can really incorporate it into practice, and through their licensure.

MR: One of the things this is reminding me of is our goal to establish media literacy as part of everyday K-12 education. We need to be a media-wise, critical-thinking nation, and in order to do that, there must be more than teachers here and there. That's why we had the idea of developing a statewide program where media literacy can be taught routinely across the curriculum in schools. It used to be taught routinely in other countries, like New Zealand and Australia. Now they're all having trouble maintaining it. There's a constant struggle to keep them going, including struggles with funding.

CML: How long have you had a historical archive, and how have other organizations made use of it?

MR: We've had an archive ever since the mid-1930s. We have these little sheets of paper with names of all the ladies who attended meetings. One of them, Leslie Spence, asked to start a study group through the American Association of University Women. The group was chaired by Jessie McCause. Spence had a PhD in English, and she really should have been a professor, but women were never hired for those positions in those days, so she taught high school. Spence looked into the idea of critical thinking/evaluating for radio programs. In 1953 or '54 she received funding from the American Council for Better Broadcasts and took off in a car by herself and made a tour that went from here to Iowa to Montana, to Idaho, to California—for a whole summer vacation trying to make contact with people whom she could interest in Look, Listen, Evaluate, and doing whatever she could to teach about media in classrooms.

KA: She kept a diary, and we have it in print form. We've been making some strides in finding someone to help us get it in shape so we can donate it to the state historical society. We're trying to get part of our archives digitized as well, especially the *Journal*. Full sets of the *Journal* have been donated to different institutions. Tessa Jolls (CML) is one of the people getting a full set. We'd also like to have it online on our organizational website. Few people are aware of what we have. It's all sitting in my basement.

MR: We have pamphlets from the 30s about good radio listening. From the 30s and 40s.

CML: Karen, what led you to join NTC?

KA: I had discovered media literacy for myself. A lot of teachers come to it this way. You pull together resources for yourself. All of a sudden, when I went to a workshop, I spotted a table

that had been put together by NTC, and here they had this table full of books and resources. They'd pretty much done it already!

MR: Everyone does it that way. They always discover it for themselves.

KA: I was a brand new teacher being asked by a principal to run a media production lab at a school. I could have stuck with it from the angle of how to use the technology, but I knew that wasn't the most important thing. It was much bigger than that.

MR: Awards have been important to our organization. We've given out a number of different awards. Our Look, Listen, Evaluate committee would ask, who is sponsoring this program? Some program sponsors were deemed to be responsible sponsors, and given a sponsor recognition award. As many as 12 to 18 sponsors were given recognition. . . We haven't done that anymore. Sponsorship has become much too fractured. . . The big one that we started in 1987 was to honor Jessie McCanse. We created it to honor individual contributions to the field of media literacy. It honors McCanse and all the principles that she stood for, and her tremendous ethical excellence.

KA: We've recognized people who have made a contribution for more than ten years. It gives us a circle of excellence to strive for—what we hope to achieve, and what we want others to achieve. It's also created an anchor of people who collaborate with us on a regular basis. That anchor provides the excellence behind the *Journal*. The award allows us to build a think tank of experts.

CML: How have you attracted the attention of readers and potential contributors to the *Journal* over six decades?

KA: Good question! If we were good at it we'd have 10,000 subscribers. We're not the best at marketing, and we've often attracted audiences by word of mouth.

MR: The big problem is that we're an all-volunteer organization. . . There was a time when we had a part-time office manager, but we haven't hired anyone in a decade. With an all-volunteer organization, everyone has jobs elsewhere.

KA: But that very system has worked for us, too. We have a guest editor for each issue. So they bring their people and connections and networks of authors and others. We usually provide the theme. The amazing part is that we've built up quite a network of authors and experts that we can go to. Will you edit this issue for us? Can you help us with this? Can you share your article with us? That's Marieli's specialty. Because of the way we run the *Journal*, we respect the work of authors. Getting contributors has been the easy part.

MR: We've also had this longevity because we've built a base with ethics. It's so important to media literacy.

### **National Telemedia Council Celebrates 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, the National Telemedia Council celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a series of events at the Pyle Conference Center at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. In keeping with NTC principles of study and conversation, the day began with a Google Hangout linking K-12 teachers and students in Madison, Wisconsin and Toronto, Canada with media literacy educator and advocate Frank Baker and media literacy pioneer Neil Andersen of the Canadian Association for Media Literacy. The exchange with Toronto teachers and students was planned in coordination with the Canadian media literacy organization MediaSmarts as part of its “Media Literacy Week” (Nov.4 -8).

Baker and Andersen affirmed the significance and impact of student media production work with appreciation, questions and commentary. Student work ranged from blog posts on digital citizenship, “memes” (commentary delivered through online photos and text), and posters which depicted the consequences and implications of hate speech and online bullying. In one interchange, Andersen pointed out that a ninth grade student’s meme not only parodied a British Wartime poster, but also centered on a food product, and could be submitted to a commercial agency. Other exchanges were held between Baker, Andersen and media literacy instructors in post-secondary institutions—an instructor at Santa Monica College (California) who offered a course on race and gender issues in media, and an assistant professor of library sciences at UW, Madison who offered a freshman information literacy course.

In a second session, Mary Moen, a veteran Wisconsin media literacy teacher, held a conversation with former media production students, now in their 40s, who discussed Moen’s influence on their lives and the directions they had taken in their professional careers. Currently, sound is unavailable for the video of this conversation, but will be available in the near future.



The day ended with the presentation of the Jessie McCauley Award, for individuals who have made significant contributions to the field of media literacy for over ten years, and who have exhibited McCauley's dedication to "the highest standards of excellence, fairness, ethics and innovation."

NTC Executive Director Marieli Rowe and President Karen Ambrosch presented this year's award to three recipients: **Frank Baker**, author and media educator from South Carolina, who operates the Media Literacy Clearinghouse website, **Barrie McMahon**, a former classroom teacher, media studies consultant and curriculum manager in the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia-- also one of the media literacy pioneers interviewed for the *Voices of Media Literacy* project, **Tessa Jolls**, President and CEO of the Center for Media Literacy, and Director of the Consortium for Media Literacy, Los Angeles, CA.

Videos of Google Hangout discussions with McMahon, Andersen, and Baker, and with all the students and instructors who participated, are available at the NTC YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSsiZ4pdag8odd9VzfTageg>

More information on MediaSmarts can be found at: [www.mediasmarts.ca](http://www.mediasmarts.ca)

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

*Uniting for Development*

#### **About Us...**

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

<http://consortiumformedia literacy.org>

## Resources for Media Literacy

**Teaching Tip:** There's still time for you and your students to take the pledge to [Vet It Before You Share It](#). Remind your students daily about using their critical thinking skills when interacting with media.

### Resources and Links for this issue:

*Journal of Media Literacy* - publication of National Telemedia Council  
<http://journalofmedialiteracy.org/>

NAMLE Google Hangout *Roots of Media Literacy*:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYHg1F4uB-o&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYHg1F4uB-o&feature=player_embedded)

NAMLE/MediaSmarts Google Hangout: <http://namle.net/2013/10/24/webinar-a-bi-national-online-chat-about-marketing-and-consumerism/>

Symposium on the Historical Roots of Media Literacy and Dedication of Elizabeth Thoman  
Media Literacy Archive: <http://historyofml.wordpress.com/dedication-of-the-thoman-archive/>

*Voices of Media Literacy* – Interviews with 20 International Pioneers:  
<http://www.medialit.org/voices-media-literacy-international-pioneers-speak>

## MediaLit Moments

### Serving Thanksgiving Twitter

Twitter is a unique medium. In a single feed, it can serve up expert and professional blogs, personal opinion, and news from international outlets and from widely varying viewpoints. In this MediaLit Moment, your social studies students will have fun examining different flavors of tweets (and linked content) about the first Thanksgiving, and will learn how to ask questions to evaluate their source and point of view.

**Ask students to evaluate a spectrum of tweets on the same topic for their sources and points of view**

**AHA!** I'm getting some of the same information, but the way it's put together is so different from tweet to tweet!

**Grade Level:** 7-9

**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:** All media messages have embedded values and points of view

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

**Activity:** Twitter feeds are designed to change rapidly, so you will need to strike a balance between pre-screening for useful content and discovering it along with your students. On the night before the lesson, search Twitter with the following terms: "Wampanoag first Thanksgiving," and "first Thanksgiving Native Americans." The first search should yield several tweets linking to an article written by a Native American woman for the website "Indian Country Today." Other notable tweets from this search may include a short blog post on the contemporary Wampanoag by Maia Weinstock (@20tauri) and the story of Squanto from @executedtoday (linked to a web address of same name). The second search should yield a variety of tweets. Search for specific tweets if you wish. Useful tweets for this activity might include: tweets linking to a BuzzFeed article on "15 Things You Didn't Know About the First Thanksgiving," a tweet linking to a short article posted by the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait, and a tweet linking to Ron Charles' Washington Post review for Nathaniel Philbrick's e-book "The First Thanksgiving."

We suggest that you limit your searches to top tweets. Doing so doesn't guarantee top quality tweets, but it can increase the odds of finding useful content. Do make sure to pre-screen any

tweet which is marked “sensitive.”

Display your searches for students, and have students practice with asking questions that help determine a text/author’s credibility, and that help to reveal the author’s point of view: Who is the publisher? Who is the author? What authority does he/she have on the topic? What kinds of sources, if any, does the text reference? Sample questions about values and points of view: What seems to be the author’s main point? Is there a larger point of view about the world that he/she would like you to accept? Questions about purpose may also be useful. For example, why would a U.S. Embassy in the Middle East bother with posting an article about the First Thanksgiving?

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2013, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>