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## Theme: Media Literacy in the Community

Media literacy educators have at least one wellspring of inspiration for their work: if we live in a media-saturated culture, opportunities for media literacy are not limited to any one place or institution. Media literacy does not require a degree. In fact, opportunities for media literacy learning are lifelong, and can be built on the experience of all members of the community. The reality on the ground, however, is that media literacy education is often limited to single institutions and organizations. There is a media literacy community, but this is largely a community of interest—practitioners communicate with colleagues who are hundreds of miles away, and travel to conferences (such as the upcoming NAMLE conference) which are equally distant.

What would media literacy education “look like” if it was fully grounded in a physical community? We can get some idea from the work of Gateway Media Literacy Partners (GMLP) in St. Louis, Missouri, a bi-state membership organization which accepts individual and institutional members alike. The following is an excerpt of an essay by Mary Elizabeth DeVelario, a student at John Paul II Preparatory School, which was published in the GMLP blog:

“ . . .we have to consume products to survive in our present environment. At times, however, we are encouraged to buy harmful or otherwise unhelpful or useless products. Media producers can be incredibly convincing at times and it can take a strong-willed individual to resist. . . .If we don’t understand or can’t process media messages then we will most certainly be lost in this ever growing world. In order to protect yourself and function properly in a media dominated culture, it’s important to be media literate.”

This column is a clear example of student leadership in media literacy advocacy. Not only is its call to action written with an intensely personal voice, the essay successfully encapsulates complex ideas in language which most readers can understand. The sustainability of Gateway Media Literacy Partners as a whole is predicated on such leadership. As GMLP founder and president Jessica Z. Brown observes, “All members and followers realize media literacy has the ability to be a nexus for change.”

In this issue of Connections, you’ll find an article about the mission and philosophy of GMLP, past and present work with institutional members, and the factors which have contributed to the organization’s success. In our research section, you’ll learn about a new book from the MacArthur Foundation on the future of learning institutions. In our resources section, you’ll find an article on the path-breaking decision by the National Association of Secondary School Principals to support the educational use of mobile and social technologies in schools. And in our MediaLit Moment, students will use new media tools such as Wordle to help spark critical thinking skills about popular media texts.

## Research Highlights

### Gateway Media Literacy Partners: Reaching a Tipping Point of Media Literacy Awareness

“The history of media literacy has always had a regional element,” remarks Art Silverblatt, a professor of communications at Webster University in St. Louis who is currently serving as vice president of Gateway Media Literacy Partners. According to Silverblatt, Madison, Wisconsin became one of the first regional hubs in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, followed by others in San Francisco, New Mexico and Boston. These centers developed over time through patterns of interest and affiliation.

Gateway Media Literacy Partners broke from many of these patterns when founding members consciously sought out a wide membership base. In the summer of 2004, invitations were sent to citizens from the St. Louis region’s public, private, volunteer and independent sectors, asking them to attend a meeting to explore the feasibility of launching an organization to heighten awareness of the need for media literacy in all communities around St. Louis. Since then, GMLP has been transformed from an informal affinity group to a non-profit organization (in 2007), and its membership roster has expanded to include health care and health education organizations, arts and leadership organizations, local media outlets, several universities, and a number of educational non-profits and civic entities. Some members, such as the Cooperating School Districts of Greater St. Louis, have a long track record of contributions to media literacy education across the region. CSD specializes in professional development for K-12 teachers, and has offered courses in media literacy, digital literacy and educational technology for the last decade. By the same token, GMLP is not dominated by the interests of any one group or sector. For example, GMLP actively recruits members from the ranks of commercial media organizations. According to GMLP founder and president Jessica Z. Brown, “We have a Media Advisory Board now. . . and people from the media have signed on the dotted line, so to speak. They understand that their welfare is contingent on the media consumer understanding media better. A lot of people look down on the PR and advertising community, but we say that they should all come into the camp so we can talk about media literacy together.”

In addition to recruiting a diverse base of members, GMLP provides unique programming support to its institutional members. For example, in 2009, the Becker Medical Library at Washington University Medical School was partnering with BJC Health Outreach (a provider of school-based health education and career exploration services) to plan a series of health literacy workshops. GMLP helped them refine their outreach strategy to target a key group of media literacy educators: school librarians. The result was “Web Resources for Schools: A Program for Health Literacy,” a course designed to help K-12 librarians use health information to foster collaboration between their libraries and the wider school community. Brown comments, “One of the purposes of the class was to make librarians aware that, if they were going to take the role of purveyor of resources, the people they serve need to understand

what they're looking at. You can't just tell them which websites are good or bad. You need to provide them with media literacy skills, skills of discernment.”

Individual members have also sought out opportunities to support and collaborate with organizations committed to media literacy education. Lynne Lang, a GMLP board member and educator at BJC Health Outreach, met Dr. Angie Beatty, executive director of Juice, Inc., at a GMLP event in 2008. Juice Inc. supports the Juice Box, LLC, a “re-imagined” corner store in an inner city neighborhood of St. Louis which not only sells nutritious food at affordable prices, but also offers free exercise and media-health literacy programs. Lang and Chris Miller, another GMLP board member and non-profit expert, met with Dr. Beatty and Juice Box operator Shawn McKie to assist them with an early round of grant applications. In 2010, Juice Inc. was recognized by the White House Social Innovation Fund as a model of innovative solutions for significant social problems in the United States.

Brown believes that one of the greatest accomplishments of GMLP to date has been its ability to focus and sustain an ongoing conversation among members on the significance of media literacy to the region's economic and social well-being: “We've reached a tipping point over the last three years--more people at least believe they know what media literacy is. Last year we started a series of columns on media literacy, and we recruited contributors from a wide variety of areas—from health, the arts, the agencies. . . We connected with all these people and asked them to comment on why they felt media literacy was important. Do all of them understand the core principles of media literacy? No, but they understand that critical thinking skills are important. . . . They understand that it's an important subject for anybody interested in public policy and health . . . They buy into the notion that GMLP is a group helping teachers and others in the community learn how to negotiate media messages.”

Such successes with ‘messaging’ and collaboration have not diverted GMLP from its focus on service to teachers and the wider community, however. Teachers working in relative isolation have met and partnered with others at public events organized by GMLP. From its relatively modest beginnings, the GMLP website has now become a valuable informational clearinghouse for anyone with an interest in media literacy education. And since its founding, GMLP has organized Media Literacy Week events across the region. When St. Louis Community College-Meramec joined as an institutional member, its Media Education Week was merged with Media Literacy Week, and the result has been a sustained, synergized offering of academic symposia and teacher workshops for the entire community.

To learn more about Gateway Media Literacy Partners, visit <http://www.gmlpstl.org>

## MacArthur Foundation Releases Book on the Future of Learning Institutions

Last year, MIT Press released a MacArthur Foundation book on the future of learning institutions. This book was preceded by a preliminary report in 2009, and readers should take note of the slight variations in title: “The Future of Learning Institutions in a Digital Age” (report), and *The Future of Thinking: Learning Institutions in a Digital Age* (book). In both publications, the authors expand the scope of research far beyond the educational applications of new media technologies to investigate the question of how learning itself could be a driver of institutional change in an information age. In the report, the authors succinctly describe the foundations of formal learning institutions challenged by informal learning online: “hierarchy of teacher and student, credentialing, ranking, disciplinary divides, segregation of ‘high’ versus ‘low’ culture, restriction of admission to those considered worthy of admission, and more” (p.10).

Both book and report focus on universities and other institutions of higher learning, in part because universities are “. . . spending large sums of money revamping their technology offerings, creating great wired spaces where all forms of media can be accessed from the classroom—but how many have actually rethought the modes of organization, the structures of knowledge, and the relationships between and among groups of students, faculty, and others across campus or around the world?” (report, p. 14).

“The Future of Learning Institutions in a Digital Age” began as a draft that the primary researchers wrote together and posted on a collaborative website developed by the Institute for the Future of the Book in January 2007. The research team engaged in extensive discussion with the many readers who posted comments. Both book and report theorize the pedagogical potential of collaborative and participatory online learning through an analysis of the process by which the team’s findings were reported and composed.

The substance of the report—and the conclusion of the book—is contained in a set of ten principles for rethinking the future of learning institutions.

- Self Learning
- Horizontal Structures
- From Presumed Authority to Collective Credibility
- A De-Centered Pedagogy
- Networked Learning
- Open Source Education
- Learning as Connectivity and Interactivity
- Lifelong Learning

- Learning Institutions as Mobilizing Networks
- Flexible Scalability and Simulation

While both the report and the book issue many calls to reform, the authors emphasize that their work is a 're-theorizing' of learning institutions in a contemporary context: "It theorizes... how virtuality changes some institutional arrangements while requiring even stronger foundational support from traditional institutions in other ways" (report, p.4). Elsewhere, the authors speculate that 'modded' or 'remixed' learning institutions may be the model of the future (report, p.40).

The report is available at: [http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/full\\_pdfs/Future\\_of\\_Learning.pdf](http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/full_pdfs/Future_of_Learning.pdf)

The book is available at: [http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/full\\_pdfs/Future\\_of\\_Thinking.pdf](http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/full_pdfs/Future_of_Thinking.pdf)



The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) conference is scheduled for July 22-25 in Philadelphia, PA. CML President and CEO Tessa Jolls will participate on two panels: The Voices of Media Literacy Project, and Perspectives on Media Literacy Education: A Global Look.

For more information about the conference go to: <http://namle.net/conference/>

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

*Uniting for Development*

#### **About us...**

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

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products.

The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

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

## Resources for Media Literacy

### National Association of Secondary School Principals Issues Position Statement on Using Mobile and Social Technologies in Schools

In May, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP) released a position statement promoting the use of mobile and social technologies in secondary schools. Founded in 1916, and with a current membership of 30,000, the NAASP provides a “national voice” for middle and high school leaders, and promotes high professional standards through research-based professional development, resources and advocacy.

The NAASP frames the issue of mobile and social technology use in terms of crisis and opportunity. On the one hand, some school leaders have been “paralyzed” by cyberbullying and sexting incidents for which guidance has often been inadequate and contradictory. As a result, many have attempted to eliminate the use of new media technologies in schools. Citing recent research from the Pew Center on Internet and Society, the NAASP observes that such measures have had little effect.

Next, the position statement draws attention to emerging trends: “. . .as mobile devices become more powerful and affordable, their potential for enhancing student learning has come into clearer focus,” and points to the 2010 National Educational Technology Plan as the most clearly articulated vision for the educational use of mobile and social technologies. The NAASP asserts that secondary schools should prepare students “. . .to be active, constructive participants in the highly connected world in which they already live and will soon work.”

The position statement includes a series of guiding principles, recommendations for school and district leaders, and for policymakers. Some echo CML advocacy on these issues and directly address principles of media literacy. For example, school leaders should not only incorporate the responsible use of mobile and social technologies into acceptable use policies, but should also “lead the conversation around connectivity and involve students in the creation of policies.” And district leaders should reduce internet filtering to “. . .maximize student access to online learning tools and to provide opportunities to exercise judgment in the selection of those tools.”

Among other guidelines, the statement recommends that secondary school leaders “participate in and provide teachers professional development on the effective use of mobile devices and networking in schools.” According to a separate press release that accompanied the statement, the NAASP is currently developing such programs for school leaders.

To access this statement, visit:

[http://www.nassp.org/Content.aspx?topic=Using\\_Mobile\\_and\\_Social\\_Technologies\\_in\\_Schools](http://www.nassp.org/Content.aspx?topic=Using_Mobile_and_Social_Technologies_in_Schools)

## MediaLit Moments

### Wordle Processing Provides Perspective

Tweens and teens often know the words to popular songs, but don't always think about them. Wordles, also known as word clouds, make the familiar unfamiliar by scrambling the words in a text. They also magnify the size of words which appear most frequently, which provides the audience with clues for interpreting significant themes or ideas in the original text. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to examine song lyrics from a different perspective, and use powerful new media tools to help them identify the values, lifestyles and points of view embedded within them.

**Have students use “word clouds” to analyze the lyrics of popular songs.**

**AHA!:** Songs use the same words over and over to emphasize values and points of view.

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

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

**Grade Level:** 5-8

**Materials:** Computer with high speed internet connection, projection screen; documents containing song lyrics which can be copied and pasted to a Wordle document window (which can be accessed at: <http://www.wordle.net>)

**Activity:** You may wish to break this activity into two parts. On the day before the lesson, you can ask students to write down the name and artist of their favorite songs and submit their selections to you. With this option, you'll need to spend a few minutes selecting from among student choices, as well as finding the lyrics online and copying and pasting the lyrics into a document. Or you can choose one or more of the songs listed below, which were among the 20 most popular songs in 2010 or 2011 (and are free of profanity or abusive language):

Katy Perry, “Teenage Dream”

B.O.B., “Nothin’ On You”

Adele, “Rolling in the Deep”

Train, “Hey, Soul Sister”

Many websites provide lyrics to pop songs, but A to Z Lyrics is among the best. Their selection is extensive, the copy isn't cluttered by advertisements or pop-up windows, and the service offers options for printing and e-mailing lyrics. You can listen to audio tracks and and/or purchase mp3 downloads as well. The URL for A to Z is <http://www.azlyrics.com> On the day of the lesson, set up your equipment, display the Wordle site, and explain how

wordles work. You may also want to withhold the name of the songs that you “wordle process” in class, and ask students to guess the song as each word cloud is generated. Display or distribute copies of the complete lyrics for each song as well. Play the audio track if you wish.

With each word cloud, ask students, what is this song about? What do the big words in the cloud tell you about the song? Direct the attention of students to Key Question #4 and ask, what can the larger words tell them about the ideas or values in the song?

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2011, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>