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Theme: The New Curriculum

In 2007, Liz Coleman, President of Bennington College, felt that both liberal arts education and American society had come to a crossroads. Challenges to the nation continued to mount, from poverty to war to education and the environment, yet ordinary citizens often played the role of spectators in the American political scene. And institutions of higher education continued to produce experts in specialized fields who, in the face of all these challenges, rarely engaged questions of value and risk in their work. What action could Bennington College take to change this state of affairs? Expanding community service programs would not be enough. None of these could adequately prepare students for the “collaborative, messy, frustrating, contentious, impossible world of politics and public policy.” Coleman reflected:

So the conversation began. . . knowing that if we were to regain the integrity of liberal education, it would take radical re-thinking of basic assumptions, beginning with our priorities. Enhancing the public good becomes a primary objective. And the accomplishment of civic virtue is tied to the uses of intellect and imagination at their most challenging (“Reinventing Liberal Arts Education,” TED presentation, February 2009).

In this issue of Connections, we explore the new curriculum that is emerging in response to the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. This radical re-tooling of learning is taking place not only at Bennington, but in a growing network of K-12 schools around the country. In our research section, we examine the structure and curriculum at several schools to arrive at a framework of new curriculum principles and attributes, and we demonstrate how media literacy instruction embodies these principles. In our resources section, we provide links to sources and organizations which offer coherent justifications for the new curriculum and additional case studies of this curriculum in action. And don't miss our MediaLit Moment, which gives your students an opportunity to laugh their way into appreciating differing audience interpretations of media messages.

Research Highlights

The New Curriculum at Work in K-12 Classrooms

One of the greatest experiments in undergraduate liberal arts education is currently unfolding at Bennington College in Vermont. Today, the college has been almost completely re-structured to address the urgent problems of the 21st century: the uses of force on the world stage, the deterioration of the global environment, crises in education and health care, poverty and inequitable distribution of wealth, and not least, the decline of civic engagement in the United States. While Bennington has not completely eliminated academic departments, the problems themselves have become the focal point of the curriculum. In their first years at Bennington, students take courses in the Advancement of Public Action. They enroll in Design Labs, where students and faculty work together without the aid of a syllabus to pose questions regarding particular real-world problems, such as Children in Crisis; and students hone problem-solving skills in courses such as Conflict Resolution and Sustainability. Students are given the choice to center their academic work at Bennington in public action, or may incorporate it into another field of study.

Bennington's revolutionary approach to undergraduate education also bodes well for media literacy. In the Media and Culture seminar, a fundamental Advancement of Public Action course, students and faculty ask the question, "What approaches can best prepare us to function effectively as critics, activists, scholars, teachers, artists, managers, and producers. . .?" In Design Labs, media often become a focus of inquiry. For instance, one Design Lab course used a case study of Great Britain to explore how a nation's global image can affect public diplomacy.

The learning initiatives that some K-12 schools are now undertaking are just as innovative as Bennington's renovation of the liberal arts curriculum. These schools are departing from a factory-based model of learning where teachers are experts in particular disciplines who deliver content knowledge to students, and replacing it with a model in which teachers design multi-faceted projects to help students apply content knowledge to the kinds of complex problems they are likely to confront in their lives as workers and citizens. In the process, teachers become facilitators to learning rather than the source of knowledge, while students gain greater autonomy and more authentic motivations for learning.

Media literacy education thrives in interdisciplinary settings such as these, where media literacy can be used as a tool for curricular integration. For example, at a biology class at New Tech High in Napa, California (one of the 60 or more schools in the New Tech Network), students work in teams to conduct research on wolf populations in North America, then deliver presentations before a panel of adult community members on the merits of re-introducing wolves into Yellowstone National Park. In assigning this project, teacher Mike McDowell becomes an important touchstone in the classroom, but not the center of class: "I'll have students come to me saying, 'I know you covered this one time,' or 'I know that I looked

at a website—but I just don't understand the energy pyramid. Can you explain that to me?' What a great chance to teach!"

"Soft" skills such as collaboration take on additional significance in this new curriculum. Bennington emphasizes mediation not only as a means for resolving interpersonal conflicts, but also as a set of interpersonal skills for engaging the "impossible" realm of politics and public policy. At K-12 schools where project-based learning is the primary mode of instruction, students gain substantial experience collaborating in small groups over the length of projects which can last for several months at a time. Many of them give students the opportunity to apply these skills outside of the classroom as well. For example, Angus King Middle School in Maine not only favors a collaborative, problem-centered curriculum, but also sends students on "expeditions" to present their findings to a wide variety of local stakeholders.

In many project-based schools, new media and communications technologies often drive the transformation of teaching and learning. At High Tech High, a group of seven schools in the San Diego area, these technologies facilitate the development of new modes of participation in the school setting. High Tech High utilizes their capacities for planning and design to help students pursue individual interests within the framework of class projects. And the role which teachers play within the school is transformed as well. They spend a substantial portion of their time working within interdisciplinary teams to design and coordinate new projects. In its "design principles," High Tech High explicitly recognizes the importance of "teacher as designer." (For more information, visit www.hightechhigh.org)

Finally, media literacy frequently plays a starring role in the new curriculum when student empowerment is emphasized. Bennington's radically revised liberal arts curriculum follows a pattern which resembles the CML Empowerment Spiral of Awareness, Analysis, Reflection, and Action (which is based on Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's groundbreaking work in the late 1940s). In the recent past, Bennington community service programs helped students become aware of social and political problems, and the academic curriculum allowed students to take an analytic approach to those problems. Now, students are allowed to reflect at length and take action on them throughout the course of their studies. Regardless of topic, media frequently become a focal point for both reflection and action. Bennington's Video Activism course explicitly explores these connections.

If you're interested in further exploration of the new curriculum, you may want to view Bennington College President Liz Coleman's 2009 TED presentation, which can be accessed on You Tube by searching for "Liz Coleman's call to reinvent liberal arts education."

The New Curriculum and Media Literacy Instruction

So how does media literacy fit within the new curriculum? A few schools which have made the transition to project-based learning create projects intended to help students learn *about* the media. In many schools, students are still analyzing or producing individual media products without the aid of key questions to guide their inquiry.

There is no doubt, however, that media literacy curricula share aims and methods with this new approach to teaching and learning. For example, an early lesson in the CML curriculum *Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media* helps students think critically about the way media are constructed by asking them to describe the differences between media violence and real life violence. Later, students deconstruct the social “reality” of violence as it is depicted in the media. In this lesson, students re-imagine scenarios presented in violent media with alternative, non-violent solutions to conflicts. In this “new curriculum” approach to media, the study of media inevitably involves the study of conflict resolution—and of mediation skills.

One change ushered in by new curriculum approaches is the shift from passive “reception” of content presented in textbooks to application of that knowledge in a variety of contexts. In the Newsroom Project, a science and media literacy curriculum implemented in Ireland, science students are asked to use critical thinking skills to examine the ways in which scientific knowledge is presented and disseminated, with news media as the focus of analysis.

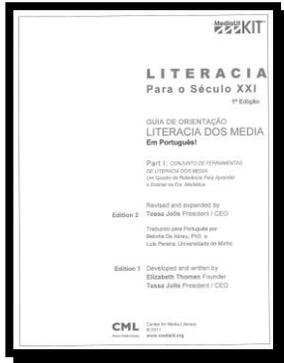
For example, in the activity “science editor for a day,” students learn how media are constructed by participating in the selection of science news. Using a list of news values such as timeliness, human interest, or controversy, students review outlines of several potential science news stories to decide which stories they would “pitch” to an editor. In “What’s the purpose?” activities, students collect science stories on the same topic from a wide variety of publications, and analyze the purposes of each. And in an activity such as “Not a textbook,” in which students compare science news stories and textbook sections on the same topic, students learn that values and points of view are embedded in all media. (See Jarman and McClune, *Developing Scientific Literacy*, listed in our resources section, for more).

Media literacy can also become a centerpiece in expeditionary projects where politics and public policy are a primary concern. In the winter/spring semester of 2003, students at ASCEND, a small, autonomous school within the Oakland Unified School District (the acronym stands for A School Cultivating Excellence, Nurturing Diversity) decided that they wanted to learn about Islam, the Middle East, and the history of conflict between Iraq and the United States. Teachers at the school accordingly designed a project which could satisfy California state standards in English, Social Studies and Visual and Performing Arts (For more on this project, search for “ASCEND” an article and video on this project at

www.edutopia.org). One activity included a pen pal exchange (both paper and electronic) between ASCEND students and children living in Baghdad, many of whom expressed anxiety about the buildup to a possible invasion. When the United States invaded Iraq in March, ASCEND students decided to call attention to the plight of their Iraqi counterparts by silently marching in the streets of San Francisco with posters bearing their photographs.

The protest by ASCEND students attracted media attention around the world, and a group of students were interviewed on the NBC “Today Show.” As students wondered why they were attracting media attention and why audiences reacted to reports about them in different ways, teachers at ASCEND asked students to examine media reports on the war. For example, students discussed news photographs, and compared photographs that seemed to elicit sympathy for the U.S. cause with others which could make audiences feel sympathetic towards Iraqi civilians.

Through this semester-length project, ASCEND teachers were able to help students use critical thinking skills to understand the significance of differing perspectives on the Iraqi conflict, and to gain greater understanding of their role as citizens in a democratic society.



Literacy for the 21st Century Translated into Portuguese

The first edition of *Literacy for the 21st Century*, which includes the complete framework for critical inquiry using CML’s Five Core Concepts and Key Questions for deconstruction, has recently been translated into Portuguese and is available as a download from CML. The translation was undertaken by Belinha De Abreu, PhD, a faculty member at the iSchool at Drexel University in Philadelphia. Dr. De Abreu is the first full-time online professor at the Drexel iSchool, and currently teaches a course on the social context of information professions. Dr. De Abreu also served as a guest editor for the Journal of Media Literacy’s current issue, “School 2.0: A Global Perspective.” You can access a review in last month’s edition of *Connections* or visit www.journalofmedialiteracy.org

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.ConsortiumforMediaLiteracy.org

Media Literacy Resources

Teaching Tip: Look for opportunities throughout the day to incorporate key words for media literacy in the classroom. Talk about *authorship, format, audience, point of view, and purpose* whether teaching Language Arts, STEM subjects, Social Studies, Visual and Performing Arts - media literacy knows no boundaries!

Resources: The New Curriculum

National Educational Technology Plan (<http://www.ed.gov/technology/netp-2010>)

Though the Department of Education's Ed Tech plan was reviewed in our December 2010 issue, this document will repay further study. It engages in a sustained discussion of many new curriculum principles, explains the theoretical connections between them, makes recommendations for implementation at state and district levels, and profiles several schools and programs which exemplify new curriculum principles.

Media Literacy: A System for Change (www.medialit.org)

What does learning, teaching and schooling look like when the teacher is no longer at the center of the classroom? The introductory e-book *Media Literacy: A System for Change* fully investigates the implications of this shift and illuminates the key role that media literacy plays in the re-organization of K-12 education. This three-part package also includes a professional development slide presentation and a comprehensive section on tools for implementation and curricular planning.

Edutopia (<http://www.edutopia.org>)

Edutopia, a project of the George Lucas Educational Foundation, doesn't just articulate a coherent vision for project-based learning, integrated studies and technology integration in schools. Its "Schools That Work" section, written and updated by a stable of seasoned educational reporters and bloggers, profiles several schools which exemplify the new curriculum, and provide detailed, accessible analysis of the practices which make these schools successful.

Bennington College (www.bennington.edu)

On this site, you'll find a commencement address (in "About Bennington") and a video presentation (in "Center for the Advancement of Public Action") in which Liz Coleman, President of Bennington College, forcefully articulates her vision for a new liberal arts. An examination of the Academics section, especially course descriptions, reveals the interesting directions which Bennington faculty and administrators are taking to realize that vision.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills (www.p21.org)

In late 2009, P21 published a set of 21st century skills implementation guides, including guides for standards, curriculum and instruction, assessment, and more. The guides not only contain a set of recommendations, but also profiles of successful schools and programs, many of which exemplify new curriculum approaches to education.

New Tech Network (www.newtechnetwork.org)

The New Tech Network provides strong evidence that education which emphasizes technology integration and project-based learning is not a passing fad. To date, NTN supports 62 public high schools in 14 states. The NTN website features a series of videos which explain their philosophy of learning and present case studies from their schools. The site also includes a very active blog in which professionals exchange views on the New Tech Network approach to teaching.

The Waters Foundation (www.watersfoundation.org)

The new curriculum encourages students to use systematic approaches to thinking and problem-solving. The Waters Foundation trains educators to help students develop the twelve habits of a “systems thinker”—i.e., essential critical thinking skills which can be applied to problems and questions across the curriculum. The Waters Foundation site includes some elaborate models for system thinking, but the habits of system thinking are very well-explained, and any educator can use the materials available on this site to incorporate one or more of these skills into their classroom practice.

Enquiring Minds (www.enquiringminds.org.uk)

Enquiring Minds is a research and development program coordinated by Future Lab and funded by the Microsoft Partners in Learning Program. The program, implemented in two British schools between 2005 and 2008, generated several research publications, including some engaging case studies, and produced a guide which not only defines and defends the Enquiring Minds approach, but also provides a comprehensive framework for development.

Ruth Jarman and Billy McClune, *Developing Scientific Literacy: Using News Media in the Classroom*. Maidenhead, UK: McGraw Hill/Open University Press, 2007. (<http://mcgraw-hill.co.uk/openupusa/>)

A scientifically literate person is able to use both previously acquired scientific knowledge and information published in a variety of media to make reasoned decisions on public policy questions involving science. *Developing Scientific Literacy* provides both theoretical and practical support to schools interested in turning their students into scientifically literate citizens. *Developing Scientific Literacy* also proves that an interdisciplinary curriculum which tackles big social questions and helps students think critically about media need not be “high tech” to be effective. What’s needed is a commitment to designing activities and projects which can encourage students to think about media, information and society on their own.

W. James Potter, “The State of Media Literacy,” *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, v. 54 no. 4 (December 2010), pps. 675-696

This concise overview of the field evaluates the entire range of studies of parent and educator interventions; provides valuable references for further study across the spectrum of all media literacy research; discusses the varied (yet complementary) definitions of media literacy, and skillfully encapsulates key issues and common themes discussed by educators and advocates.

Med!aLit Moments

30 Ways of Seeing

In your classroom, all 30 of your students will see 30 different versions of events that happen in class. Such is the nature of individual perception. Likewise, at the movie theater, audience members may see the same images, but that doesn't mean they all "see" the same film. In a way, it's the audience that makes the movie, not the director or the producer. In this MediaLit Moment, all 30 (or more, or less) of your elementary school students will have the chance to experience firsthand the different ways in which audiences respond to the same media message.

This lesson is adapted from a lesson in CML's *5 Key Questions That Can Change the World*. For more lesson ideas, visit the CML site at www.medialit.com

Have students view a silent excerpt from a film which features physical comedy

AHA! My friends don't see exactly what I see even when we watch the same movie!

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

Grade Level: 2-4

Materials: DVD Player and DVD of feature film

Choose a scene from a live-action film which your students are not likely to be familiar with, but also choose something which makes frequent use of physical comedy. This will help your students make some good guesses about the significance of the action on screen. A scene from a classic such as Frank Capra's *Arsenic and Old Lace* would be a good choice (e.g., the scene in which Cary Grant as Mortimer Brewster discovers a dead body—which the audience cannot see---in the window seat of his aunt's parlor).

Activity: Grab students' attention by asking them questions about their favorite films, especially comedies. Let students know that not everybody sees the same thing when they watch a movie, and that they're going to find out how that happens during this lesson.

Play the silent clip for students two or three times so that they get a good "shot" at guessing the meaning of the action on screen. As you discuss the different interpretations that students have of the clip, draw their attention to the distinction between what they actually observed and what they interpreted. And have fun, too. You might want to have students vote on what they think is the most likely explanation/interpretation for what they saw.

Play the clip again with the sound on so that students can discover what actually happened in the scene. In your final discussion, draw from their experience to help them understand that different people everywhere will see the same movie differently.

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>