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Theme: Parents and Media Literacy

When media scholar Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village” in the early 1960s, he imagined a world in which people would use the power of electronic media to become more involved with each other’s affairs. As CML President Tessa Jolls (with co-authors Barbara J. Walkosz, Mary Ann Sund) argues in “Global/Local: Media Literacy in the Global Village,” contemporary globalized media are part of McLuhan’s global village in the sense that they transmit values, lifestyles and points of view from across the world. And yet they are hardly the media that McLuhan imagined. In the last fifty years, “the media” have become a pervasive force in our society. They are not just a vehicle for sharing values and points of view, but teach them as well. And, as some scholars argue, they have edged out schools, teachers and parents as primary socializing agents of children (Gerbner et al. 2002).

Before the advent of globalized media, parents were able to help children filter information and messages that came their way through the accepted community norms of the local “village.” How can parents compete now? Spending time with children as they use media is one option, and it’s a great one when parents think of themselves as teachers and take advantage of “teachable moments” at home, checking whether their children understood the significance of “what just happened” on screen, or explaining why an online post troubles them.

When parents and children use the CML framework of Core Concepts and Key Questions, the process of asking key questions about media can substantially extend opportunities for learning. Current pediatric research also validates this approach. In September 2010, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement on media education which asserts that children in the new millennium need to develop a new form of literacy which can help them “understand and decode a variety of different media” (p.2), offers a version of the core media literacy concepts as “prime tenets of media education” (ibid.), and urges parents to teach children “critical viewing skills” (p.3).

The utility of the Key Questions and Core Concepts isn’t limited to time spent watching screen media, however. It can be used to sustain ongoing family conversations about media—in the living room, the car and anywhere else. Social media such as Facebook and MySpace offer other venues where parents can use the framework with their children. Parents need to help children apply critical thinking skills not only to what they read, watch and consume, but also to what they produce and post online.

Media literacy is not just about analysis of the media that children consume, but critical thinking about all the media that children use, and parents have a very important role to play in educating children about their media use. A post from Dr. Michael Rich’s “Ask the Mediatrixian” advice column at the Center on Media and Child Health provides a poignant example. “Staying Sane in Seattle” writes to Rich that her parents didn’t have a television in the house, and that she didn’t feel deprived as a child. Once she started attending college, however, she scheduled her classes to avoid missing her favorite soap operas. She asks, “Is

there anything wrong with just cutting out electronic media completely out of my own kids' lives?" Rich responds:

"...it's not much different from the college freshmen who get into trouble with binge drinking when they first have access to alcohol. . .you had no experience using media, so you never got the opportunity to develop skills in critical viewing.

"...Critical viewing is critical thinking in a media environment—you learn to determine what is good in media, what expands your experience, builds your knowledge, makes you think and feel anew—and what does not. A critical viewer learns to seek out and use positive media in focused, directed ways, and then to turn it off and do other things."

It's common for parents to feel overwhelmed by the tide of media content that's available and the technological prowess of their children. With its questions about the authorship, purposes and values of media messages, the CML framework can be a valuable asset for parents as they teach children to focus and direct their own media use over a lifetime. In any case, parents have much more to contribute to the media education of their children than they are often led to believe. Parents can help children take charge of their experience with all media--from television to cell phones to social networking platforms--in ways which reflect their highest aspirations for their own lives. In other words, parents play a vital role in helping today's children become ethical, responsible citizens in a digital age.

Sources cited:

Tessa Jolls, Barbara J. Walkosz, Mary Ann Sund, "Global/Local: Media Literacy for the Global Village." Paper submitted for inaugural meeting, International Media Literacy Research Forum, UK Office of Communications, London, 14-16 May, 2008

George Gerbner et. al, "Growing Up with Television: The Cultivation Perspective," in J Bryant and D. Zillman, eds., *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002

Research Highlights

Cyberbullying

In May 2010, Amanda Lenhart, director of the Pew Internet and American Life Project's research on teens, children and families, presented the findings of a recent survey on cyberbullying, including original research conducted at the Internet and American Life Project with over 2,000 teens and their parents.

Most research distinguishes between separate incidents of online harassment, and cyberbullying, which is repeated over time. Despite such distinctions, researchers in the field operate from differing definitions for cyberbullying itself, which makes generalization between research studies more difficult. Depending on how it is defined, between 9% and 33% of youth ages 10-18 have been bullied online. Most research studies do concur that mid-teens (ages 14-17) experience the greatest prevalence of online harassment and bullying.

Bullying commonly involves an imbalance of power between a perpetrator and a victim, but according to the research surveyed, it is not uncommon for perpetrators to also be victims, and for victims to retaliate online. One clear implication of this research is that general policies regarding cyberbullying may not always be effective, and that parents, teachers and school administrators will need to handle incidences of cyberbullying on a case by case basis.

One unequivocal finding of research conducted by the University of New Hampshire Crimes Against Children Research Center is that school is by far the most common place that youth report being bullied (31%, vs. 13% online). This research appears to complement the 2008 report of the Digital Youth Project at the MacArthur Foundation, which found that children's social media use largely functions as an extension of their lives offline. In the conclusion to the Pew presentation, Lenhart also commented, "The venues for bullying have diversified. . .but the impulse behind bullying behaviors hasn't changed—just the vehicle."

News reports to the contrary, cyberbullying has not reached epidemic proportions. In one major study, 62% of teens surveyed had never been bullied online. In addition, some research suggests that significant portions of teens aren't bothered by online harassment or bullying. On the other hand, other surveys indicate that about one third of teens who have been harassed online are extremely upset or frightened by the experience; in addition, teens who are bullied online (and often bullies themselves) experience higher levels of depression, substance abuse and other problems which pose significant health risks, including abuse or victimization offline.

For parents concerned about cyberbullying, we also suggest taking something of an "umbrella" approach to this and other issues with new media technologies (e.g., sexting) rather than treating them in isolation. All of them illustrate the meaning of "digital citizenship,"

and underscore the importance of creating communities of mutual respect, both online and off. You may want to read our interview with Anne Collier of Net Family News for more on this topic, or peruse the digital citizenship curricula recently published by Common Sense Media (listed in the resources section of this issue).

Lenhart's presentation, "Cyberbullying 2010: What the Research Tells Us," may be accessed at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/Presentations/2010/May/Cyberbullying-2010.aspx>

Interview with Anne Collier, founder and editor of NetFamilyNews.org

Parents in the United States have many parenting blogs to choose from, but few of them discuss parenting and new media technologies at any length, and only one, Net Family News, delivers insightful, up-to-date commentary on these issues. Anne Collier, founder and editor of Net Family News, has served on two national task forces on youth risk online and was a reporter and editor on print, radio, TV and Web editions of the Christian Science Monitor for nearly fifteen years. Urged on by parents familiar with her work, Collier co-founded Net Family News in 1999. More recently Collier and co-author Larry Magid published *MySpace Unraveled: A Parent's Guide to Teen Social Networking* (Peachpit Press, 2006) and *A Parent's Guide to Facebook* (available at <http://www.fbparents.org>)

CML managed to catch up with Collier just before the holidays, and in these interview excerpts, Collier gives her views on media literacy and digital citizenship.

Connections: What distinguishes your blog from other technology blogs or sites run by parents?

Collier: *They're all about the technology—when the issue isn't so much about technology as connections and relationships. The problems created by online anonymity, for instance, force us to look at digital citizenship and what it means. This entire conversation about technology and kids is forcing us to deal with our humanity more than ever--and that's a good thing.*

Connections: How does media literacy fit into this discussion?

Collier: *In this age of information overload, media literacy is more critical than it has ever been. What we have to understand is that media is a two-way thing now—incoming and outgoing. It's imperative that we learn how to deconstruct the media we produce, from text messages to status updates to tweets, e-mail and blog posts. What's behind all that production is behavior and intention, so media is behavioral now. Digital citizenship and media literacy are melting into each other as a result. How we act and what we say in media is now crucial to our wellbeing online. This new, two-way media literacy is not just essential to academic success or becoming a functioning member of society, it's about our protection as well, our wellbeing.*

Connections: In one of your recent posts, you argue that we need a strengthened sense of community in online spaces, and that adults should be seeking out ways to foster what you call the “guild effect” in children’s online communities. What is the guild effect, and what do you think we can do to encourage its development?

Collier: *It needs to be a joint effort. Industry needs to be involved as well as parents, educators and young media users themselves. I’d like to see that discussed at FOSI [Family Online Safety Institute]. We need to figure out how the people who run the websites and virtual worlds can turn young users into stakeholders in their own wellbeing as well as the community as a whole. And what’s involved there? Moderators are some of the experts that we need to bring into the discussion. For example, Club Penguin has moderator penguins. Staff members assume avatars and talk with kids, and sometimes kids become fans. Whyville.net is another good example of a site that makes an effort to foster a sense of community, in particular with its community newspaper. These are elements for creating the guild effect. Kids need to become a member of something, a key stakeholder, to have some ownership in how that community does, and in making that community a nice place to be. We all need to think creatively about how to make that happen.*

I’m also thinking about the GoodPlay Project at the Harvard School of Education. They’ve been doing some amazing qualitative research, and one of the things that the research has turned up is that kids often feel a fundamental lack of efficacy online. They don’t feel they can change anything when they encounter content or behavior they don’t like in web sites. It’s often the adults around them who make their online experience inconsequential – as “virtual” or a waste of time. I’ve learned from the GoodPlay research that, if we want kids to be good citizens online, we need to see social media and their use of it as consequential, as an important part of their lives, and help them see that they can make a difference in social spaces online.

I really felt the authors of the latest study from the Kaiser Family Foundation (linked to from <http://www.netfamilynews.org/?p=28710>) conducted their study of children’s media use from the lens of mass media natives. The study was riddled with the words “consume” and “consumption.” They didn’t “get” that children aren’t just consumers of media; they’re users – producers of and participants in – media, which are far from mere entertainment now. As parents and teachers we can make their online experience inconsequential when we emphasize the need to pull kids away from electronic media in order to do homework. It’s better to teach them how to use media meaningfully and mindfully and be more open-minded and less fearful. They’re not just the potential victims they’re often portrayed as in the news media, and they can have an impact on how good or bad their experiences are.

Cable in the Classroom Re-Launches Website with Media Literacy 101

Over the last year, Cable in the Classroom has been re-designing its website, and the re-launched site was brought online in December 2010. The new site is divided into three general sections that reflect CIC's new priorities: Digital Citizenship, Programming and Resources, and Broadband. The Digital Citizenship section explores the links between internet safety, digital literacy, and digital ethics at greater length, and parents will find a comprehensive introduction to media literacy ("Media Literacy 101") in the sub-section for digital literacy.

The Programming and Resources section now offers an augmented selection of online multimedia. CIC executive director Frank Gallagher comments, "The world has changed. In an analog era, videos were 30 to 60 minutes long, and were played on a VCR. . . We've re-designed the site so that teachers have greater access to videos and other engaging resources delivered over the Internet, especially short two to five minute clips that help teachers zero in on a particular topic."

The Broadband section of the site includes a subsection for online games and activities, including three sophisticated and engaging interactive games created by CIC. These offer access to professional expertise, short videos to explain relevant concepts, and a game experience that allows for self-paced progression.

Gallagher hopes that the re-designed site will also help users gain a different perspective on the use of video content for learning. "Students are no longer just consumers, but producers as well, so it's important for them to learn how to make use of video regardless of the source." Gallagher points to CNN Student News as one example. Students and teachers can submit their own video reports on current events, and some will be included in daily Student News broadcasts. One of the interactive games, "Shakespeare: Subject to Change," features clips of professional actors delivering lines from a famous Shakespeare soliloquy, a video of several amateur actors delivering the same lines, and invites students to submit videos with their own readings. Visit <http://www.ciconline.org>.

www.medialit.com

In fall 2010, the Center for Media Literacy re-launched its website with a fresh look, updated articles, and new media literacy curricula for teachers and parents. The site is available at www.medialit.com

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://www.ConsortiumforMediaLiteracy.org>

Media Literacy Resources

Teaching Tip: Keep the parents of your students in the loop regarding media literacy resources and activities. Encourage parental involvement by distributing the resources listed here.

Media Literacy Resources for Parents

Common Sense Media (<http://www.commonsensemedia.org/>)

Common Sense Media's first contribution to the field was a wide selection of movie and DVD reviews written to help parents decide what to watch with their children. That selection has expanded to a wide range of games, television content, mobile apps and more. Now the site also presents basic information to parents on the entire spectrum of new media technologies which children are using today, tip sheets on individual topics, and advice for parents on each topic with specific parenting suggestions for children of all age levels (from pre-K to high school). And Common Sense Media has just released digital literacy and citizenship curricula for K-5 and middle school which include videos, activities and case studies to keep students thinking about the meaning of citizenship online. These curricular packages are freely available to teachers and parents alike.

Vodafone Digital Parenting Magazine (www.vodafone.com/parents)

Vodafone, one of the largest mobile phone service providers in Europe, has just launched its Digital Parenting magazine, and the first issue is at once comprehensive, useful, innovative and accessible. Articles cover the entire range of issues relating to children and their use of new media technologies, from data security to cyberbullying to teens' use of the Internet to search for health information. These include contributions from nearly two dozen widely recognized experts, and each is accompanied by graphics and tip sheets that can help families formulate concrete, reasoned strategies for parenting in a digital age. The issue is seasoned with timely and relevant interviews with parents, teachers, grandparents, including a "generational" exchange between father and son, and each of the many articles in this issue include links to several resources helpful to parents on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Center on Media and Child Health (www.cmch.tv)

CMCH has been featured in more than one resources article in *Connections*, but it's the only organization we know of which applies current pediatric research to the questions and concerns of parents about their children's electronic media use. The site includes short, easy to understand articles which explain the health effects of children's media use over a variety of media, advice to parents, and links to current research. CMCH publishes a quarterly e-newsletter which translates the latest research into practical advice for parents, and its "Ask the Mediatrixian" column, which features CMCH founder Dr. Michael Rich, is worth exploring at some length. Archived columns are organized by topic and date, and provide answers to many common questions from parents.

Connect Safely and Net Family News (www.connectsafely.org, www.netfamilynews.org)

Connect Safely, directed by Anne Collier and Larry Magid, is one of the few internet safety organizations which emphasizes the capacity for children to create positive online experiences rather than focusing on those experiences which children should avoid. The site includes tips and advice for parents on a variety of topics, a moderated forum on parenting and technology issues, a resources section with a comprehensive listing of online safety resources, and a section for news and analysis as well. Net Family News offers intelligent, insightful commentary on new developments in the tech world and their relationship to children, parents, education and digital citizenship.

Center for Media Literacy (www.medialit.com)

Articles, activities, and lessons from the MediaLit Kit are just some of the sources available on the CML website to help parents become confident, thoughtful media literacy educators in their homes and communities. You might also want to check out guides such as *Literacy for the 21st Century* and *Media Literacy: A System for Change* to gain new perspectives on the education of children in a digital age.

Net Cetera (www.onguardonline.gov/topics/net-cetera.aspx)

Net Cetera, a recent project of the Federal Trade Commission, is a comprehensive guidebook intended to help parents talk and “raise issues” with kids about living their lives online. The guidebook includes safety information on new media technologies and resources online.

Radical Parenting (www.radicalparenting.com)

Vanessa Van Petten, the director and operator of this parenting blog, is a woman in her 20's who was technologically savvy in her teens, and many of the articles on this blog offer advice on teens and technology (e.g., Cyberslacking, Pros and Cons of Virtual Studying). Though Van Petten does not hold advanced degrees in counseling or psychology, she has enjoyed considerable success as a relationship coach for teens and their parents, and bills herself as a “youthologist”—essentially, someone who can understand family problems from a teen perspective and stays current with youth trends. Van Petten also offers writing internships to youths 12-20 to insure that articles and advice reflect a teen perspective. Currently, the site sells “The Dirt-E Secrets of an Internet Kid,” an e-book on children’s online lives.

Articles

Between June and December 2010, Jan Hoffman wrote three articles on cyberbullying for the *New York Times*. Hoffman’s articles focus on parents and schools. The articles are available at the *New York Times* website under “Times Topics” for People, H, and Hoffman.

Henry Jenkins, “Media Literacy Begins at Home,” *Technology Review*, December 5, 2003

Jenkins delivers insightful commentary on the potential of parents as partners and mentors in developing the media literacy skills of their children.

<http://www.technologyreview.com/communications/13422/>

MediaLit Moments

The Avatar Shuffle

According to Commonsense Media, many children around the age of 7 or 8 begin to use avatars to visit virtual worlds like Club Penguin or Habbo Hotel (Commonsense Media site, “All About Avatars”). Children have many creative choices to make when they select an avatar to represent them. Depending on the site they’re visiting, their avatar could be an elephant, or a samurai warrior. Within games, they also have choices for customizing the look of their avatar (their clothes or hairstyle, for example).

In this MediaLit Moment, your students will get a chance to see how other students perceive the characters they use to represent themselves online. In the process, they’ll become aware of the fact that they are creating a character in the same way characters are created (i.e., constructed) for movies and TV.

Have students react to drawings of online avatars from other unidentified students in class

AHA!: I get to decide who this character is and how he/she looks or feels!

Key Question #1: Who created this message?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed

Grade Level: 2-4

Materials: pencil, marker, crayon or other drawing implements, paper

Activity: Ask students about the virtual worlds they like to visit online, and the kinds of avatars they use to represent themselves in those worlds. Ask them to draw their favorite version of one of their avatars (yes, the one with the bright pink hair will be fine!) Students who haven’t visited a virtual world can make up an avatar for themselves.

Have students number themselves in class. Use any numbering or category system you wish. Ask students to write their numbers on their drawings, and devise your own method for students to shuffle the drawings and distribute them to other students in class.

Ask students to write at least one word on the drawing they’ve received which describes the avatar. You may want to ask students to focus on physical characteristics and emotions. Is this avatar upright and confident? Nervous and shaky? Sad and droopy?

Students identify themselves by number, and drawings are returned to the students who drew them. Tell students that the comments they received on their drawings show them what other

kids might think about their avatar when they see it online. Are these characters different from who they are in real life? Discuss with the entire class. In discussion, emphasize to students that they aren't just pushing a few buttons to change something about their avatar, they're creating a complete character. They're just like the people who put together animated movies or television shows. They make up characters that viewers can recognize--but they only exist in the world of that movie or TV series.

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>