Media Literacy Foundations

RENEE HOBBS

University of Rhode Island, USA

The concept of media literacy has been circulating in the United States and Europe since the beginning of the 20th century; but it continues to morph and change as a result of changes in education, technology, media, popular culture, and society. Media literacy is widely understood as the knowledge, competencies, and life skills needed to participate in contemporary society by accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating media messages in a wide variety of forms. Media literacy can be understood as the outcome of the practice of media literacy education. In some contexts, the broader term "media education" is used to refer to all the contexts in which learning about media occurs.

The most widely used definition of media literacy emerged from the Aspen Institute, which brought together a group of media literacy experts in 1993 to define media literacy as a "movement to expand notions of literacy to include the powerful post-print media that dominate our informational landscape," noting that it "helps people understand, produce and negotiate meanings in a culture made up of powerful images, words and sounds" (Aufderheide, 1993, p. 1). This definition has been used in most scholarly and practitioner discourse on media literacy education in the United States. In parts of the world, the term media education is used to refer to the knowledge and the analytical tools that empower consumers to function as autonomous and rational citizens (Tyner, 2004).

There are a number of approaches to media literacy now in wide circulation around the world. As RobbGrieco (2015, p. 5) notes in his history of media literacy in the United States, "the conceptual contours of meaning, theory, and application of the basic definition and the terms within it have been continuously contested and employed in very different ways by scholars and practitioners with different disciplinary and institutional interests." Scholars have identified how different stakeholder groups seek distinctive names to represent their understanding of the competencies for using media and technology. A variety of terms have been promulgated that aim to capture the full constellation of habits of mind, knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for full participation in contemporary, media-saturated society. Some of these include media competence, cyberliteracy, new literacies, digital literacy, web literacy, transliteracy—and more.

To understand the dynamic concept of media literacy, it is necessary to appreciate its theory, history, and pedagogy as well as some of the ongoing controversies and challenges in the field. As we will see in this encyclopedia and in the pages that follow, media literacy has entered the education and cultural system in four distinct ways: as an expanded form of literacy; as an intervention to address potential harms of

media exposure; as an approach to integrate digital technology into education; and as a dimension of global citizenship.

Theories of media literacy

Because of its transdisciplinary nature, media literacy has been conceptualized in relation to four primary theoretical positions: as a means to counter the negative effects of mass media; as a way to counter the hegemonic power of mass media; as a way to recognize the structure and constructed nature of media messages; and as a way to acknowledge the role of play, identity, voice, and subjectivity in the practices of consuming and creating media. Each of these four traditions has its adherents and its detractors, which has contributed to some of the "great debates" in the field (Hobbs, 1998).

The rhetorical tradition, developed by scholars in the humanities, has long recognized the importance of language and other symbol systems as a structuring tool for human thought and action. For 2500 years, beginning with the transition from oral to written culture, people have been debating whether media emancipate us or are forms of social control. The argument goes back to ancient times, with questions like these: How does our use of symbol systems like language and images shape social relationships? What is gained and what is lost with the strategic use of language and other symbols as tools for expression, persuasion, and advocacy? How can symbol systems be used to express, distort, or misrepresent our sense of personal identity, the value of social relationships, and our understanding of reality? During the 20th century, the rise of structuralism and poststructuralism created renewed interest in these questions, exploring the relationship between language and other symbol systems as they connect to perception, cognition, and meaning-making. In the field of communications, Marshall McLuhan was perhaps the foremost scholar within this tradition. By practicing an inquiry approach to media, McLuhan theorized that learners might shift the perspective on the media environment in order to assess what is gained and lost through our uses of media technologies— ultimately in order to act more strategically about media use (Strate, 2016).

The media effects tradition has also been aligned with media literacy, as researchers who examine the impact of media on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors conceptualize media literacy as a means to minimize the potentially negative consequences of media violence, cyberbullying, stereotyping, or consumer culture. Media literacy is positioned as a way to solve the problem of children and young people, who can be duped or misled by media messages from advertising, news, and Hollywood. In this view, audiences are vulnerable to negative media messages and media users must gain knowledge and skills in order to resist media influence and attain a critical distance from the overwhelming, symbolic environment of the media. It's been claimed that this theoretical framework presents a deficit model of learners. But advocates of this position say that it is responsive to the real needs of parents and educators, as they see children's active imitation and uncritical acceptance of the values presented in mass media and popular culture. In a comprehensive meta-analytic assessment of 51 studies, Jeong, Cho, and Hwang (2012) found a substantial overall effect size of media literacy interventions on

outcomes such as media knowledge, criticism, perceived realism, influence, behavioral beliefs, attitudes, self-efficacy, and behavior. Researchers found that the magnitude of intervention effects did not vary by agent, target age, the setting, audience involvement, topic, country, or publication status.

The critical cultural studies tradition has embraced media literacy as a means to theorize the audience of mass media as made up of passive dupes of the culture industries. In this view, the mass audience consumes the products of the culture industries, which reproduce power relations in favor of those who control the means of production, and finds the products of this culture (movies, music, and the like) both irresistible and inescapable; it cannot help delighting in seeing itself reproduced in the endless variation of representations of capitalist mass production. But media products alienate the masses from the means of production of their own culture and suppress critical thinking on the part of the audience by creating a spectacular demand for automatic cognitive processing. Audiences may like the pleasure of feeling superior to mass media and popular culture. It makes them feel like experts. But critical theorists scorn this pleasure, positing that it produces a false consciousness in the mass audience. Media literacy education that pulls back the curtain on the political economy of the media helps audiences become capable of resisting dominant discourses through oppositional meaning-making (Cappello, 2016). Assuming that corporate media institutions perpetuate injustices, students are encouraged to identify sexist, racist, heteronormative, and class-biased media messages and representations and to create their own media messages to counter these representations. They are also offered opportunities to access information and entertainment that is produced by nonmainstream independent and diverse producers (Kellner & Share, 2005).

In the American cultural studies tradition, audiences are conceptualized as active, not passive, engaged in the creative work of meaning-making. Media literacy competencies include those related to play, identity, voice, and subjectivity in the practices of consuming and creating media (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2007). Research on highly engaged audiences, including fans, has been critical to the development of this line of argument. In this tradition, media fans are a perfect model of the active audience; theorists emphasize the idea that culture is produced by the people, from the bottom up, as well as from the top down, by powerful institutions like mass media. The rise of user-generated content and the use of digital platforms for creating and sharing ideas have validated this approach (Bulger & Davison, 2018). Thus educators engage learners through the use of tools for accessing and responding to popular culture, including blogging, message boards, and video production. The engagement that results from interest-driven learning is thought to promote lifelong learning skills (Ito et al., 2013).

To synthesize ideas from these four theoretical traditions, a set of key concepts and core principles has developed among the knowledge community, as the latter expanded and developed through contact at scholarly and professional conferences and through publication of ideas in books, journals, monographs, and videos. Originally developed by the Center for Media Literacy (Thoman & Jolls, 2005), as part of the Aspen Institute Leadership Conference on Media Literacy in 1992, and further refined by a variety of scholars over time, the key concepts include these five ideas:

1. All media messages are constructed.
2. Media messages use medium- and genre-specific codes and conventions.
3. Different people interpret media messages differently.
4. Media have embedded values and points of view.
5. Media messages have political, economic, and social power because they influence perceptions, attitudes, and behavior.

In addition, the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) (2007) identified a few key principles of media literacy: (i) media literacy education requires active inquiry and critical thinking about the messages we receive and create; (ii) media literacy education expands the concept of literacy to include all forms of media (i.e., reading and writing); (iii) media literacy education builds and reinforces skills for learners of all ages—skills that, like print literacy, necessitate integrated, interactive, and repeated practice; (iv) media literacy education develops informed, reflective, and engaged participants, essential to a democratic society; (v) media literacy education recognizes that media are a part of culture and function as agents of socialization; and (vi) media literacy education affirms that people use their individual skills, beliefs, and experiences to construct their own meanings from media messages.

Some history

The history of media literacy is complex and contextual, as each country and region has an account of how these ideas and practices developed over time and historical accounts are situated in personal and collective memory (Hobbs, 2016). Film viewers recognized the importance of talking about film within the first years of exposure. Between 1915 and 1934, educators and parents around the world engaged in community film discussions and dialogues, redefining notions of spectatorship. One example of a local cinema club devoted to the study of film was the Cleveland Cinema Club, founded in 1915. In Europe, cinema clubs existed across the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, influencing how a generation of educators conceptualized film and media education. Researchers have also described the historical origins of youth cinema clubs in Russia, noting that the form and structure of these clubs made them serve as a precursor to contemporary media literacy education programs (Federov & Friesem, 2015).

During this time, the concept of active film viewing also became a part of the serious study of film in the context of university and higher education; and, as Polan (2007) has observed, there were three distinct threads to teaching about film that focused on (i) the industrial craft of film production; (ii) the aesthetic form and content of film stories; and (iii) the cultural influence of film on social norms, attitudes, and behaviors.

During the 20th century, the press, radio, and television began to be understood as shaping culture and society, generating a significant level of interest around the world in understanding how new tools of expression and communication affected children and youths. In the United States, the Payne Fund studies represented a first attempt to investigate the media's influence in public life using principles of social science to measure film's impact on knowledge, behavior, and socialization. Some of the Payne studies explored the frequency of movie viewing as well as the influence of films on

children's sleep habits and on their attitudes toward racial and ethnic groups. Other studies showed that children and adults acquire considerable general information about school subjects, including English, history, and geography from movie viewing. It was hypothesized that movies could revolutionize the means by which traditional academic subjects are taught in the classroom, especially for those who were not academically gifted. As a result of pioneering media educators, educational media began to be produced in a number of countries around the world.

The culminating volume in the Payne Fund Studies was Edgar Dale's (1938) *How to Appreciate Motion Pictures*, a book intended for high school teachers and students. This work stood in distinct contrast to the dominant discourse of the other Payne Fund studies, which in general characterized children and young people as being seduced by the overwhelming visual spectacle of films into adopting questionable moral values. Dale wrote about the practice of *film appreciation*, which, even then, had some early advocates among high school teachers, social workers, youth advocates, parents, and the clergy. He believed that film viewers could analyze cinematography, study the narrative representations of race and wealth, assess historical accuracy, and relate a character's behavior to their own personal lives (Dale, 1938). Such methods of viewing were thought to produce discriminating viewers who would serve as new types of consumers, enticing Hollywood to create quality films. Advocates of film appreciation thought they could produce a new generation of filmmakers, who might reform Hollywood either by working within the film industry or by competing with Hollywood in alternative venues devoted to educational and documentary filmmaking.

Media reform and media advocacy have long been comingled with media literacy. All across the United States, "Better Broadcast" groups were formed in the 1930s, often co-sponsored by organizations such as the American Association of University Women. By the 1950s, with the advent of television, in the United States these groups came together at a national level, to form the American Council for Better Broadcasts, with representatives from 18 national organizations and 18 state groups and with delegates from 93 cities in 34 states. Their mission was to stimulate the broadcasting of good radio and TV programs; to study in order to arrive at a standard for judging the programs; and to encourage stations in fulfilling their obligations to serve the public interest, convenience, and necessity. The monthly newsletters of this particular organization morphed into the *Telemedium*, a publication of the National Telemedia Council in Madison, Wisconsin.

In England, early government support for media education was an important source for funding and visibility. The British Film Institute, a government agency, actively supported a discourse community of educators by disseminating publications, journals, curriculum resources, and conferences, as Bolas (2009) has chronicled in his history of the rise of screen education in England. In the 1950s the British Society for Education in Film and Television published the journal *The Film Teacher*, edited by Derek J. Davies, which aimed to explore how to immunize children from negative media influence and help children practice discrimination in evaluating film quality. Other journals promoting audiovisual education also proliferated, and the British Film Institute promoted instructional strategies for teaching film through the dissemination of film extracts, which were made available to teachers. The topic of media violence

also attracted substantial attention, as British educators were concerned about films "in which vicious behavior is disguised, presented in a form in which audiences can enjoy it with a clear conscience" (Mackendrick, as quoted in Bolas, 2009, p. 74).

British students could take a film appreciation class in some schools, but they did so as an additional subject superimposed upon an already full schedule and with no academic credit to be acknowledged. By the mid-1950s, the book *Teaching Film*, by Grace Greiner, identified five approaches to teaching film to high school students through discussion, namely moral, sociological, critical, technical, and historical approaches. During this time, it was relatively rare to engage children and young people in film production; but one article, published in *Film Teacher* in 1955, describes a program where children created short film and learned that the process involves a lot of planning, collaboration, and hard work.

Often considered the grandfather of the North American media literacy movement, Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan created a media literacy syllabus for high school students under the rubric of a new approach to language and literature, emphasizing the practice of interpretation not through an expert transmission model, but through probing, deconstruction and close reading and using advertising and other popular culture texts for literary analysis (Strate, 2016). Terms such as genre, language, audience, message, medium, meaning, form, content, and context were central to this approach. As a result, Canadian English educators took the early lead in developing curriculum resources to extend these ideas into classrooms.

At a time when media education was generally conceptualized as teaching *with* film and media, McLuhan's emergence in the 1960s offered educators fresh perspectives on educating the TV generation by teaching *about* media. In his view, societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media with which individuals communicate than by the apparent content of the communication. His dictum "the medium is the message" came to embody the historical view that the means by which human beings communicate have always structured their actions. He also introduced the idea that the mass media were turning the world into a "global village," shrinking the world in terms of shared experience.

By the mid-1970s there was a growing discourse about television's impact on children and youths and increasing public awareness that media literacy could support media reform initiatives, educational innovation, and assistance for parents and caregivers. Elizabeth Thoman created *Media&Values* as a magazine for the Center for Media and Values, which became the Center for Media Literacy. As the most influential nonprofit organization promoting media literacy in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, the Center helped formulate media literacy concepts and educational practices and inspired cross-disciplinary conversations between stakeholders in media studies, education, and the public sphere that contributed to the current field of media literacy education. Over 16 years, the *Media&Values* magazine reflected the shifts in media literacy education, from a mostly protectionist paradigm concerned with helping individuals mitigate negative media effects to an empowerment paradigm seeking to help people use media for their benefit (RobbGrieco, 2015).

During the 1970s, some schools in the United Kingdom were actively involved in teaching about media. In 1980 Len Masterman wrote *Teaching about Television*,

which offered a comprehensive philosophy and overview of pedagogical methods that represented best practices among educators. At the time, a distinct tension was evident between educators who focused on the analysis of media and educators who made students engage in creating media. In some US communities, school-based programs in media production developed in the 1970s, but were eventually cut owing to budget shortfalls; as a result, afterschool and summer youth media programs sprang up to provide children with media production learning experience. When Neil Postman popularized the idea of media literacy through books like *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (published in 1985), he emphasized the ways in which media discourses were reshaping politics, education, religion, and the news and positioned media literacy as an empowering solution to the cultural problems brought on by television. His longstanding support for media literacy spurred interest from college faculty and educators in K-12 (i.e., US primary and secondary education) schools.

A national and international community developed by the 1980s, as schools were actively experimenting with media literacy in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and other nations. In 1987, Ontario was the first Canadian province to mandate media education, publishing *Media Literacy*, a resource guide for middle school and high school learners. In 1998 a national organization was formed to support the work of media literacy educators and became the National Association for Media Literacy Education. During this time a scholarly and professional literature began to emerge.

All over the world, media literacy education shifted greatly during the second decade of the 21st century as a result of increased access to digital technology in schools. Digital technology enabled new forms of pedagogy as the Internet entered the classroom. By 2005, many states and provinces in North America included a media literacy strand in English language arts education, which gave media literacy equal status with traditional areas of interest and emphasis such as oral communication, vocabulary, reading, and writing. In Turkey, a media literacy elective course was developed for middle-school students in 2007. By 2015, more than 350 000 children would enroll in the course each year (Hobbs & Tuzel, 2017).

The rising public concern about fake news and disinformation has also had an impact on public interest in media literacy. Although measuring media literacy has proved contentious, especially as regards the development of comparable, standardized indices, policymakers and citizens recognize the value of a well-educated population whose members have the habits of mind needed to critically analyze and create media in a wide variety of forms (Bulger & Davison, 2018). For these reasons, media literacy has entered the education and cultural system in four primary ways: as an expanded form of literacy; as an intervention designed to address potential harms of media exposure; as an approach designed to integrate digital technology into education; and as a dimension of global citizenship.

Media literacy as literacy

Educators and artists understand media literacy as aligned with the practice of creative expression, interpretation, and meaning-making. Terms such as author, text, audience,

message, meaning, and representation have also expanded from their earlier semantic areas, which were focused on writers and writing, toward the inclusion of forms of expression and communication that incorporate visual, audiovisual, sound, interactive, and digital formats and modes.

Although literacy has traditionally been understood as the sharing of meaning through spoken and written language, the concept is expanded to include a wider variety of symbolic forms, for example images, graphic design, and multimedia. New forms of expression and communication are displacing the primacy of print language. Because social media tools and platforms have enabled group collaboration and community dialogue, audiences have become producers, and the gap between productive literacies and receptive literacies has narrowed.

In this view, literacy is no longer confined to the domain of printed language. Literacy educators have also begun to rediscover the role of media literacy in reading and writing instruction. There are important connections between visual production and alphabetic reading and writing, as writing teachers used the instructional strategy of producing media to encourage critical analysis, promote creativity and invention, consider the relationship between image and word, and destabilize concepts of linearity and originality through the application of concepts such as assemblage and remix. Although print-based text is in no way endangered, it now "interacts with digital technologies and multimodality to create more complex texts" (Carrington & Robinson, 2009, p. 5). Learners' engagement with media is explored through the examination of various interpretive communities and affinity groups, which develop as those who have similar interests learn from one another with digital texts, tools, and technologies.

Literacy practices are embedded in situational contexts. The widespread availability and circulation of texts creates opportunities for many different forms of shared cultural participation, and yet also demands increased levels of intellectual curiosity, critical analysis, and creative expression. Inspired by Vygotsky's work on apprenticeship, literacy scholars acknowledge intellectual interdependence between learners and teachers in a particular culture, as learners do not merely absorb messages in the cultural environment but actively co-construct them (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). Thus literacy practices are shifting from a focus on individual behavior to a focus on collaborative, social activity.

As an expansion of traditional literacy education, some people see media literacy education as a distinct set of pedagogical practices such as close analysis of media texts, cross-media comparison, keeping a media diary, and multimedia composition (Baker, 2018). These instructional practices help learners in many ways: they build awareness of the constructedness of the media and technology environment, deploy strategies useful in the meaning-making process, increase knowledge about the economic, political, and historical context in which media messages circulate, and appreciate the ways in which messages influence attitudes and behavior (Wilson, Grizzle, Tuazon, Akyempong, & Cheung, 2011).

Support among literacy educators for the practice of media literacy education has been a major factor in the rise of media literacy education around the world. In some European countries, media literacy education has developed in informal learning contexts, owing to the absence of media literacy frameworks in the national curriculum.

Although France, Finland, and some other countries have media education authorities as government agencies, media education is generally not embedded in ministries of education but is thought to have a broader focus that embraces culture, community, and business stakeholders. In the United States, with its decentralized education system, support for digital and media literacy education exists in many of the over 15 000 local school districts. It is not known how many students receive exposure to media literacy education, but one study with a representative sample of California young adults found that nearly one third claimed to have had such exposure in school (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). Although nearly all states include media literacy learning outcomes in their state education standards, each of the school districts must decide whether and how media literacy education is implemented.

Media literacy education in schools generally happens as a result of initiatives taken by enthusiastic individual teachers or school leaders (Hobbs, 2011). University departments may advance media literacy in K-12 education by using school–university partnership models, which bring undergraduate and graduate students into schools to support the integration of media literacy into the curriculum (Scharrer, 2006). Motivated practitioners advocate for, implement, and develop programs on the basis of their own interests in and motivations about media literacy and in relation to the unique needs of their communities. This results in a highly varied practice (which may have a focus on the Internet, advertising, news, or entertainment media), generally paired with some form of production activities (e.g., video production).

Media literacy interventions

Extending from the media effects tradition, there have been a number of empirical investigations of media literacy interventions carried out by social science researchers from the disciplines of psychology, communication or public health, and many of these demonstrate meaningful effects on targeted attitudes and behavior (Jeong et al., 2012). Most interventions approach media literacy as a means to address problematic dimensions of media culture that stem from the content or usage of mass media, digital media, and popular culture. Often labeled protectionist media literacy, these interventions address issues such as media violence, stereotypes in the representation of gender and race, materialism and consumer culture, the glamorization of unhealthy behavior, for example drinking and smoking, the practice of sexting and cyberbullying, and the like.

Media literacy is associated with increased resilience in children and youths, which is a key factor in health and human development. Media literacy has been found to be effective in a wide variety of contexts and learning environments. Some programs consist of only one or two short sessions; others last for a semester or more. Some focus on one issue (violence, advertising, alcohol); others address many different topics (for a review, see Martens, 2010). For example, researchers have found that adolescents with higher levels of media literacy education (as measured on an 18-item Smoking Media Literacy scale) showed lower levels of smoking behavior and intent to smoke (Primack, Gold, Land, & Fine, 2006). They have tested whether children's fears about terrorism could be mitigated through a three-session media literacy program that

targeted their mothers, who learned about how news is constructed in order to be able to calm children who might witness violence on TV news (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Weiner, & Kendall, 2008).

Some media literacy interventions might not be truly educational, however. Researchers have explored how to reduce children's exposure to television and TV violence. In one study, researchers implemented a 28-lesson classroom-based media literacy intervention on 496 children aged 6–10. These children were persuaded to develop critical attitudes to TV violence and the program was successful in decreasing the amount of time during which they watched media violence, an effect that lasted up to 8 months (Rosenkoetter, Rosenkoetter, & Acock, 2009). Such approaches to media literacy, while potentially valuable, have been criticized as essentially coercive and not truly embodying the core principles of media literacy education, which respect the autonomy of the individual viewer to make independent and well-informed choices.

The rise of digital literacy and learning

Among educational practitioners and scholars, the rise of digital technologies in education provided an impetus for an interest in media literacy pedagogy to develop. The term *digital literacy* is beginning to be used to designate the technical, cognitive, and social competencies, knowledge, and skills needed to communicate effectively and to participate in the contemporary knowledge economy. Digital literacy draws fresh attention to issues of identity in a networked world; multimodality, hypertexts, mash-ups, and remixing; games, learning, and literacy; and collaboration and peer production (Jones & Hafner, 2012). The American Library Association (2013) has defined digital literacy as "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, understand, evaluate, create and communicate digital information. Basic reading and writing skills are foundational; and true digital literacy requires both cognitive and technical skills."

The use of mobile media, social media, and new technologies for teaching and learning is creating new opportunities for digital and media literacy education in the context of elementary and secondary education; but there are some concerns about what actual learning outcomes may result from the use of technology tools for transmission-based (and not inquiry-based) learning. This is why media literacy educators have long sought to differentiate their work from that of information and communication technology (ICT) experts or educational technologists. The rise of digital media and learning runs the risk of resurrecting "an old and well-established confusion between teaching about media and teaching through media" (Buckingham, 2009, p. 6). Media literacy educators also differentiate between using media to merely engage learners, as a delivery system, and using them as a teaching aid. When media are used in these functional or instrumental ways, critical questions about cultural, political, and economic contexts tend to be marginalized or ignored.

Media literacy educators use digital technology to cultivate student agency and voice by creating media. Studies of media production in and out of schools have demonstrated how these instructional practices capitalize on children's knowledge and familiarity with media culture (Burn & Durran, 2007). Such work is thought to

represent authentic learning, which connects classroom and culture. However, in some schools and communities, the norms and routines of the school culture may interfere with media literacy. Analyzing and creating media in the classroom takes up valuable classroom time and teachers struggle with the "messy engagement" that occurs when students are able to use their popular culture knowledge and creative media production skills (Hobbs & Moore, 2013). For these reasons, in many European and American schools, digital media production stands as a challenge to the traditional academic curriculum. Its novelty as an in-school activity can make it difficult to create organic connections between school learning, everyday life, and digital media.

Talk about mass media, entertainment, and popular culture in the language arts classroom can even be perceived suspiciously by students, as they ask: "What does this have to do with school?" The traditional, content-focused framing of knowledge in the traditional school curriculum contributes to a social reality in which children accept the truth that school knowledge falls within the logical space of the school world, rather than expecting school activities to have any relevance to life outside school (Pérez Tornero, Celot, & Varis, 2007).

With support from charitable foundations, a research and practice area known as *digital media and learning* has developed. The group of scholars behind it advocates broadened access to "learning that is socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented toward educational, economic, or political opportunity" (Ito et al., 2013, p. 1). For example, a young person who is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults, and is then able to link this learning and interest to academic achievement, career success, or civic engagement is demonstrating a form of connected learning. This kind of learning is conceptualized as resilient, adaptive, and effective because it is built on the foundation of the individual person's interests, where social support from others helps overcome adversity and provide recognition. Connected learning taps into the opportunities provided by digital media to link more easily home, school, community, and peer contexts of learning; to support peer and intergenerational connections that are based on shared interests; and to create more connections with nondominant youth, drawing from the capacities of diverse communities.

In one project, researchers developed a 3-year longitudinal study to examine a learning environment intentionally designed to provide urban youths with tools that allowed them to create, collaborate, and communicate with new media production technologies. The program offered a series of after-school clubs in graphic design, digital broadcasting, movie making, music recording and remixing, and video game development. Results show that, with effective mentoring, students were able to shift their sense of identity to position themselves as authors (Barron, Gomez, Martin, & Pinkard, 2014). Scholarly inquiry into the practices that contribute to youth empowerment is a vital part of research in digital and media literacy education.

Media literacy and citizenship

Media literacy is increasingly recognized as a tool for strengthening young people's participation in civic and political life. It has the capacity to enable young people to seek

out information on relevant issues, evaluate the quality of the information available, and engage in dialogue with others in order to form coalitions. The rise of interest in media literacy education has emerged from a need to respond better to globalization and citizenship in contemporary society (Mihailidis, 2014).

A global approach to media literacy and global citizenship has emerged, spurred by increasing contact between scholars globally, as well as by cross-national studies of media literacy in Europe, Asia, and around the world (Livingstone, 2004). Scholars understand media literacy in relation to a complex interplay of issues, including differential access to technology, democratic political systems and the rise of populism, xenophobia and nationalism (Ranieri, 2016), and the cultural milieu of various nations as they advance media literacy education into formal, informal, and tertiary education (Frau-Meigs and Torrent, 2009).

Media literacy educational initiatives are also becoming cross-national, as programs like the Salzburg Academy on Media and Global Change offer summer learning opportunities to students, teachers, and experts from multiple countries (Mihailidis, 2018). UNESCO has developed a global teacher education program, the Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers, a resource designed to support member states in their continuing work toward achieving the objectives of the Grünwald Declaration (1982), the Alexandria Declaration (2005), and the UNESCO Paris Agenda (2007)—all related to media and information literacy. Acknowledging the convergence of radio, television, Internet, newspapers, books, digital archives, and libraries, the curriculum is designed for integration into the formal teacher education system.

Although some critics have questioned the value of teaching students to discriminate between fact and opinion in the so-called post-truth world, the general consensus among educators and scholars continues to be to emphasize the value of giving students multiple and varied opportunities to analyze and create media messages, especially in relation to community, social, and cultural issues that they themselves perceive to be relevant.

Research has shown media literacy education to be effective in supporting the habits of mind associated with citizenship in democratic societies. One study found that nearly half of the high school students from 21 high schools in California had engaged in various classroom activities designed to support media literacy competencies, including critically analyzing the trustworthiness of websites, using the Internet to get information about political or social issues, and creating content for the web. These activities are associated with higher rates of online politically driven participation (Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2012), and other research has shown that students who received media literacy education were better at analyzing critically media messages that were aligned with their existing beliefs, thus countering natural tendencies toward confirmation bias. In a quasi-experimental design study with a large sample of California youth, those with greater levels of exposure to media literacy education outperformed others in the ability to recognize the bias embedded in a political media message that aligned with their preexisting beliefs (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017).

Governments have also approached media literacy largely in relation to issues of deregulation, economic development, and cultural preservation. As part of the Communications Act of 2003, the British broadcast regulator OFCOM is building

public awareness of media literacy to promote the interests of all citizens and to protect them from harm. When the agency was established, its focus was on media industry deregulation; it removed obstacles to cross-media ownership and to global media companies operating in the UK market. As a policy, media literacy is thought to be more important in a deregulated, market-driven economy, where people need to be responsible for their own behavior as consumers (Buckingham, 2009). In this view, then, the global media industry is a stakeholder in advancing the goals of media literacy. However, in the US, the media sector has supported some forms of media literacy, but not others. Companies such as Time Warner, Google, and other large companies provide financial support to Common Sense Media, a San Francisco-based media literacy organization that caters to the needs of parents and educators. Private philanthropies associated with journalism have supported the growth of news literacy by providing financial support to nonprofit organizations such as the News Literacy Project.

Some people consider media literacy to be a type of advocacy or social movement, aimed particularly at young adults, children, and parents. Social movements arise in response to changing social norms and values, as a form of political participation whereby people engage in a sustained public effort to make social change by using communicative action to raise awareness, to build strategic alliances, and ultimately to challenge and reform some aspects of contemporary culture. Those who see media literacy as a social movement are generally motivated by their awareness that changes in audience behavior can bring about changes in the media industry. This is sometimes conceptualized as demand-focused media reform. A wide variety of small groups, nonprofit organizations, and other individuals advocate media literacy at the local and community levels. While this approach to media literacy has been roundly criticized as a form of moral, cultural, or political defensiveness (Buckingham, 2003), it continues to have traction in the United States and some other countries, especially in relation to the ever-changing forms of contemporary digital technology, mass media, and popular culture. A number of youth and media advocacy groups are allied with the social movement conceptualization of media literacy. For example, as part of their advocacy efforts for media literacy, Girl Scouts USA conducted survey research with girls aged 11–17, finding that about half of the sample are regular viewers of reality TV shows and that regular viewers accept and expect a higher level of drama, aggression, and bullying in their own lives (Girl Scouts USA, 2011).

One grassroots policy issue that has been directly addressed by media literacy educators is the issue of copyright and fair use. Media literacy educators rely on the ability to use copyrighted materials for learning purposes. In Europe, national copyright laws have created some confusion about basic pedagogical practices like using images in PowerPoint slides or remixing digital content. When American media literacy educators experienced a generalized climate of fear, uncertainty, and doubt about the legal use of copyrighted materials for teaching and learning, they worked collaboratively, with support from expert legal scholars, to develop a Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Media Literacy Education. As a result of advocacy carried out by media literacy educators, the US Copyright Office has extended fair use to include the ability to "rip" videos from DVDs for media literacy education in the context of higher as well as elementary and secondary education (Hobbs, 2010).

Media regulators themselves may engage in media literacy in countries like Singapore or Turkey, where the media regulator (MDA or RTUK) takes responsibility for curriculum development and teacher training in media literacy programs offered in the elementary and secondary schools. Frau-Meigs and Torrent (2009) catalogued these practices in a book titled *Mapping Media Education Policies*, which outlined activities in Austria, Brazil, Spain, South Korea, Finland, Argentina, Turkey, and other countries. At the Education, Youth and Culture meeting held in Brussels in 2009, the Council of the European Union formally adopted a policy on a European approach to media literacy in the digital environment that was "embedded in a package of measures to ensure an effective European single market for emerging audiovisual media services" (O'Neill, 2010, p. 328).

In some countries, media literacy policy aims to build national audiences for the audiovisual economic sector and to protect cultural heritage against the encroachment of Hollywood. Long an advocate for the use of critical inquiry in media literacy teacher education, the British Film Institute shifted gears in 2012, advancing a new strategy called Film Forever, a plan to nurture business growth and cultural vibrancy across the United Kingdom. Thus the British Film Institute promotes media education in after-school programs largely because of an interest in supporting the British film industry. The program is designed to support a prosperous film business sector by cultivating audiences. Funded by a significantly increased lottery allocation and government grants, fundraising, and new entrepreneurial activity, the Film Forever program relies on collaboration with the United Kingdom film industry as well as on nonprofit cultural and educational partners.

The European Commission has invested millions of euros in supporting European nations to develop the media and information literacy competencies of its citizens. This reflects an increasingly global awareness of the need to empower citizens by providing them with the competencies necessary to engage with traditional media and new technologies. Key elements include understanding the role and functions of media in democratic societies; understanding the conditions under which the media can fulfill their functions; critically evaluating media content; engaging with media for self-expression and democratic participation; and developing the skills needed to produce user-generated content.

Access to quality media and information content and participation in media and communication networks are necessary to realize Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regarding the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Recognizing the increasingly competitive environment of the audiovisual sector that results from an inclusive knowledge society, the Council of Europe has noted that the education system must get better at supporting people's ability to access, understand, evaluate, create, and communicate media content as part of lifelong learning. It noted: "The responsible and informed use of new technologies and new media requires citizens to be aware of risks and to respect relevant legal provisions, but most literacy policies should address such questions in the context of a generally positive message" (Council of Europe, 2007, p. 2). The Council recommended the progressive development of criteria intended to assess the levels of media literacy in member states from 2011 on, a task that has been initiated by a number of federal agencies with support from

key European scholars. Some scholars question, however, the extent to which European media literacy education will balance the "consumer" orientation (promoting the use of media) with the "citizenship" orientation (empowering critical analysis and active participation), especially given the recalcitrance of the formal education sector in many European nations (O'Neill, 2010).

The UN–Alliance of Civilizations Media Literacy Education Clearinghouse is a global repository of media literacy education, research, media education policy, and youth media. Nordicom and UNESCO have also established a clearinghouse to collect research on youth and media with the goal of broadening the public's knowledge and awareness of media literacy. Policy work continues to raise awareness and to mobilize all stakeholders involved, including high-level political decision-makers, for maximum impact. These organizations collaborate with others, international and national, on launching initiatives such as public awareness campaigns on media literacy, helping to set up national and international meetings with key decision-makers.

Finally, both government policymakers and charitable foundations have explicitly addressed the need for media literacy for the wider population, not just for children and youths. For example, the Federal Communications Commission's Future of Media initiative sought public comment on this question: What kinds of digital and media literacy programs are appropriate to help people both use new information and communication technologies effectively and to analyze and evaluate the news and information they are receiving? The Knight Commission's influential report *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age* identifies media literacy in relation to enhancing the information capacity of individuals, particularly in the area of citizenship. And it is impossible to overstate the influence of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which from 2007 to 2016 invested more than $120 million in research on digital media and learning, supporting a variety of diverse research and practical projects that are transforming the field.

The future of digital and media literacy

The future of media literacy will be shaped by the practices of the present era. There are a number of strategies that could help if they were more readily available to all learners, for example intensifying the focus on the young (Bazalgette, 2011). But substantial obstacles exist. Consider this. When the testing company that administers the high-stakes scholastic assessment test (SAT) required for admission to American colleges used a question that invited students to critically analyze the genre of reality TV, it asked them to write an essay in response to the following prompt: "Reality television programs, which feature real people engaged in real activities rather than professional actors performing scripted scenes, are increasingly popular. These shows depict ordinary people competing in everything from singing and dancing to losing weight, or just living their everyday lives. Most people believe that the reality these shows portray is authentic, but they are being misled. How authentic can these shows be when producers design challenges for the participants and then editors alter filmed scenes? Do people benefit from forms of entertainment that show so-called reality, or are such forms of entertainment harmful?" (Strauss, 2011, p. 1).

While media literacy educators cheered at the news and students may have valued the chance to critically examine reality TV as part of the testing experience, some educators who prioritize the need to transmit core knowledge were less than satisfied. Some objected to any educational emphasis on activating students' prior knowledge from their experience with mass media and popular culture, seeing it as "dumbing down" the curriculum.

The biggest obstacle that faces the future of global media literacy concerns attitudes and perceptions that media literacy is not a "serious" subject. Among the elites who control and set educational policy, this is perhaps the most substantial and well-entrenched attitude about media literacy that persists today: in Britain, a recent empirical analysis of British newspaper coverage found that media studies was represented and framed as a "soft" or "Mickey Mouse" subject and 61% of news stories depicted the academic program as having little educational value (Bennett & Kidd, 2017). Such long-standing attitudes continue to limit the application of digital and media literacy in elementary and secondary educational institutions around the world. In the future, it will be important to address these attitudes and align the ever-changing conceptualizations of media literacy, so that it continues to be relevant to the growing intersections of technology, mass media, education, digital and social media, and popular culture.

SEE ALSO: Creativity and Media Production in Schools; Media Literacy among the Elderly; Media Literacy and Alcohol Abuse Reduction; Media Literacy and Pragmatism; Media Literacy and Smoking; Media Literacy and Visual Culture; Media Literacy as Contemporary Rhetoric; Media Literacy Education and Second Language Acquisition; Media Literacy in Communication Education; Media Literacy in Teacher Education; Media Literacy in the Primary Grades; Media Literacy in the Social Studies NCSS; Media Literacy, Terrorism, and Fear; Media Literacy with New Immigrants; Media Production in Elementary Education

References

American Library Association. (2013). Digital literacy, libraries and public policy. Office of Information Technology Policy. Retrieved from http://www.districtdispatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/2012_OITP_digilitreport_1_22_13.pdf

Aufderheide, P. (1993). *Media literacy: A report of the national leadership conference on media literacy*. Washington, DC: Aspen Institute, Communications and Society Program.

Baker, F. (2018). *Close reading the media*. New York, NY: Routledge/Middle Web.

Barron, B., Gomez, K., Martin, C.K., & Pinkard, N. (2014). *The digital youth network: Cultivating digital media citizenship in urban communities*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bazalgette, C. (2011). The entitlement project: Manifesto for media education. Retrieved from http://www.manifestoformediaeducation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Manifesto-Cary-Bazalgette.pdf

Bennett, L., & Kidd, J. (2017). Myths about media studies: The construction of media studies education in the British press. *Continuum, 31*(2), 163–176.

Bolas, T. (2009). *Screen education: From film appreciation to media studies*. Bristol, England: Intellect.

Buckingham, D. (2003). Media education and the end of the critical consumer. *Harvard Educational Review, 73*(3), 309–327.

Buckingham, D. (2009). The future of media literacy in the digital age: Some challenges. *Medienimpulse, 2.* Retrieved from http://medienimpulse.erz.univie.ac.at/articles/view/143

Bulger, M., & Davison, P. (2018). *The promises, challenges and futures of media literacy.* New York, NY: Data and Society Institute. Retrieved from https://datasociety.net/pubs/oh/DataAndSociety_Media_Literacy_2018.pdf

Burn, A., & Durran, J. (2007). *Media literacy in schools: Practice, production and progression.* London, England: Chapman.

Cappello, G. (2016). Gianna Cappello on Theodor Adorno. In R. Hobbs (Ed.), *Exploring the roots of digital and media literacy through personal narrative* (pp. 107–125). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Carrington, V., & Robinson, M. (2009) *Digital literacies: Social learning and classroom practices.* New York, NY: SAGE.

Comer, J.S., Furr, J.M., Beidas, R.S., Weiner, C.L., & Kendall, P.C. (2008). Children and terrorism-related news: Training parents in coping and media literacy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 76*, 568–578.

Council of Europe. (2007). Recommendation CM/REC-2007–11 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on promoting freedom of expression and information in the new information and communications environment. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe.

Dale, E. (1938). *How to appreciate motion pictures.* New York, NY: Macmillan.

Federov, A., & Friesem, E. (2015). Soviet cineclubs: Baranov's film/media model. *Journal of Media Literacy Education, 7*(2), 12–22.

Frau-Meigs, D., & Torrent, J. (2009). *Mapping media education policies in the world: Visions, programmes and challenges.* Paris, France: UNESCO.

Girl Scouts USA. (2011). Real to me: Girls and reality TV. Retrieved December 1, 2011 from http://www.girlscouts.org/research/publications/girlsandmedia/real_to_me.asp

Hobbs, R. (1998). The seven great debates in the media literacy movement. *Journal of Communication, 48*(1), 16–32.

Hobbs, R. (2010). *Copyright clarity: How fair use supports digital learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/SAGE.

Hobbs, R. (2011). The state of media literacy: A response to Potter. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, 55*(3), 419–430.

Hobbs, R. (2016). *Exploring the roots of digital and media literacy through personal narrative.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Hobbs, R., & Moore, D.C. (2013). *Discovering media literacy: Digital media and popular culture in elementary school.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/SAGE.

Hobbs, R., & Tuzel, S. (2017). Teacher motivations for digital and media literacy: An examination of Turkish educators. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 48*(1), 7–22. doi: 10.1111/bjet.12326

Ito, M., Gutiérrez, K., Livingstone, S., Penuel, B., Rhodes, J., Salen, K., … Watkins, C. (2013). *Connected learning: An agenda for research and design.* Digital Media and Learning Research Hub, Irvine, CA. Retrieved from https://dmlhub.net/wp-content/uploads/files/Connected_Learning_report.pdf

Jenkins, H., Clinton, K., Purushotma, R., Robison, A., & Weigel, M. (2007). *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century.* Chicago, IL: MacArthur Foundation.

Jeong, S.-H., Cho, H., & Hwang, Y. (2012). Media literacy interventions: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Communication, 62*(3), 454–472.

Jones, R., & Hafner, C. (2012). *Understanding digital literacies.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Kahne, J., & Bowyer, B. (2017). Educating for democracy in a partisan age: Confronting the challenges of motivated reasoning and misinformation. *American Educational Research Journal, 54*(1), 3–34.

Kahne, J., Lee, N.J., & Feezell, J.T. (2012). Digital media literacy education and online civic and political participation. *International Journal of Communication, 6*, 1–24.

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2005). Toward critical media literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and policy. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 26*(3), 369–386.

Lee, C., & Smagorinsky, P. (2000). *Vygotskian perspectives on literacy research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *Communication Review, 7*(1), 3–14.

Martens, H. (2010). Evaluating media literacy education: Concepts, theories and future directions. *Journal of Media Literacy Education, 2*(1), 1–22.

Mihailidis, P. (2014). *Media literacy & the emerging citizen: Youth, engagement and participation in digital culture*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Mihailidis, P. (2018). Civic media literacies: Re-imagining engagement for civic intentionality. In E. Gordon & P. Mihailidis (Eds.), *Learning, Media and Technology, 43*(2), 152–164.

National Association for Media Literacy Education. (2007, November). Core principles of media literacy education in the United States. Retrieved from http://namle.net/publications/core-principles

O'Neill, B. (2010). Media literacy and communication rights: Ethical individualism in the New Media environment. *International Communication Gazette, 72*(4–5), 323–338.

Pérez Tornero, J.M., Celot, P., & Varis, T. (2007). *Current trends and approaches to media literacy in Europe*. Brussels, Belgium: European Commission. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/literacy/docs/studies/study.pdf

Polan, D. (2007). *Scenes of instruction: The beginnings of the US study of film*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Primack, B.A., Gold, M.A., Land, S.R., & Fine, M.J. (2006). Association of cigarette smoking and media literacy about smoking among adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 39*(4), 465–472.

Ranieri, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Populism, media and education: Challenging discrimination in contemporary digital societies*. New York, NY: Routledge.

RobbGrieco, M. (2015). *Media for media literacy: Discourses of the media literacy education movement in* Media & Values *magazine, 1977–1993*. Unpublished dissertation, Mass Media and Communication Program, Temple University, PA.

Rosenkoetter, L.I., Rosenkoetter, S.E., & Acock, A.C. (2009). Television violence: An intervention to reduce its impact on children. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 30*, 381–397.

Scharrer, E. (2006). "I noticed more violence": The effects of a media literacy program on knowledge and attitudes about media violence. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 21*(1), 70–87.

Strate, L. (2016). Lance Strate on Marshall McLuhan. In R. Hobbs (Ed.), *Exploring the roots of digital and media literacy through personal narrative* (pp. 49–65). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Strauss, V. (2011, March 15). SAT question on reality TV stirs controversy. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/sat-question-on-reality-tv-stirs-controversy/2011/03/15/ABjNyCY_blog.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b35c0209051d

Thoman, E., & Jolls, T. (2005) Media literacy education: Lessons from the Center for Media Literacy. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, 104*(1), 180–205.

Tyner, K. (2004). Beyond boxes and wires: Literacy in transition. *Television and New Media, 4*(4), 371–388.

Wilson, C., Grizzle, A., Tuazon, R., Akyempong, K., & Cheung, C. (2011). *Media and information literacy curriculum for educators*. Paris, France: UNESCO.

Further Reading

Beach, R. (2007). *Teaching media literacy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin/SAGE.

Bennett, W.L. (2008). *Civic life online: Learning how digital media can engage youth*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Buckingham, D. (2003). *Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture*. Cambridge, England: Polity.

Felini, D. (2014). Quality media literacy education: A tool for teachers and teacher educators of Italian elementary schools. *Journal of Media Literacy Education, 6*(1), 3–25.

Masterman, L. (1985). *Teaching the media*. London, England: Polity.

Nichols, J. (2006). Countering censorship: Edgar Dale and the film appreciation movement. *Cinema Journal, 46*(1), 3–22. doi: 10.1353/cj.2007.0003

Pérez Tornero, M., & Varis, T. (2010). *Media literacy and new humanism*. Moscow, Russia: UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education.

Renee Hobbs is professor of communication studies and director of the Media Education Lab at the Harrington School of Communication and Media at the University of Rhode Island. Her research examines the conditions of media literacy education in elementary and secondary schools and she has authored eight books and over 150 scholarly and professional articles. She has offered professional development programs in media literacy on four continents. She is the founding editor of the *Journal of Media Literacy Education,* an open-access, peer-review journal sponsored by the National Association for Media Literacy Education.