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# Debates and Challenges Facing New Literacies in the 21st Century

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## INTRODUCTION

When the Educational Testing Service launched a new online test to measure students' critical thinking and technology proficiencies in the spring of 2006, many scholars and educators from the fields of education, communication and library and information sciences realized that the concept of 'new literacies' had reached a new phase. More and more educators have begun to recognize that, despite their students' familiarity with the internet and other technology, young people may or may not have skills necessary to access, analyze, and evaluate the abundance of information and entertainment available online. For example, some students may know how to upload videos and construct websites but they may be unable to identify reliable, authoritative resources from the web. Many students do not know how best to interpret, analyze, and communicate a website's content via a

well-supported argument. In justifying the need for such a test, one expert pointed out, 'Today's undergraduates are generally far less prepared to do research than were students of earlier generations, despite their familiarity with powerful new information-gathering tools' (Breivik, 2005: 22). Some wonder whether, by making information accessible and convenient, the rise of the Internet has contributed to a *decrease* in young people's critical thinking skills.

Educators are attempting to respond to the emerging but significant changes in literacy, technology and culture that are now underway in contemporary society. But in many ways, schools have made only the most superficial accommodation to the changing nature of knowledge that is resulting from the digital multimedia revolution. The lecture and the textbook are still the dominant modes of instruction at both the secondary and university levels. Students still demonstrate their mastery over printed knowledge either

through oral or written presentation. According to Henry Jenkins (2006c), emergent forms of knowledge production or communication are seen as peripheral to the core mission of education, and are usually the first item to be cut in each new budget crisis.

Among some educators, the use of media, technology and popular culture is regarded as a part of remedial practice, so that it is considered acceptable for students to watch and discuss the film adaptation of *Hamlet* because teachers may believe that the drama alone will not hold students' attention. The practice of critically analyzing films, advertising, news media or popular culture is still not offered for its own inherent value in promoting reasoning and analysis skills (Marsh, 2006). In many schools in the USA, computer use is limited to isolated sessions in the library or computer lab, where students are likely to be drilling math problems, checking sports scores, or listening to music instead of gathering information or creating digital texts (Oppenheimer, 2003). In general, there continues to be a substantial disconnect between the visionary language of education and communication professionals, scholars and industry leaders and the actual practices of elementary and secondary educators in both school and non-school settings.

The rise of the internet has created a sense of urgency concerning the need to redefine literacy to incorporate technology, mass media and popular culture. There are a number of diverse conceptualizations of literacy (or 'new literacies') which have been proposed in the USA, the UK and many Western nations over the past 15 years or more. In 1998, when I first identified the 'great debates' among stakeholders in media literacy, it was the perspectives of K-12 educators, activists and scholars whose voices proliferated, arguing about whether media literacy should be conducted in school or after-school programs, whether it should be integrated within existing curricular areas or stand alone as a separate subject, and whether or not media companies should contribute to the media literacy movement (Hobbs, 1998). Today, various perspectives on new

forms of literacy are now being articulated by education practitioners in elementary and secondary schools as well as scholars in the fields of education, library and information science, and communication/media studies. Other important voices include ideas from technology leaders, heads of government agencies and political leaders, medical and public health professionals, leaders of non-profit youth-serving organizations, multimedia artists and activists, and members of the business community. All these stakeholders are invested in shaping the future of new literacies.

Most people agree on the importance of both helping children and young people use and create messages using technology. In the process, students can enter into the process of critically analyzing digital media, popular culture and the array of technology-infused social practices that are part of contemporary life. This chapter shows some of the key disagreements and arguments that are developing among stakeholders as new debates have begun to emerge about why and how this work should occur. There are a multiplicity of aims and goals associated with the process of accessing, analyzing, evaluating and using media and technologies. Some seek to expand the concept of literacy so that it will reinforce existing cultural and personal values, while others seek to challenge and transform society. In this chapter, I discuss four distinct approaches to these new literacies that have emerged in the past 15 years, outlining the major themes of each and describing some of the argument and criticism that has circulated. Then I examine some of the ongoing challenges for practitioners in the youth media field, which has experienced significant growth in recent years and where new literacies are being explored with children and teens in after-school programs, technology centers and other non-school environments. Next, I articulate the tensions between 'old' media literacy and 'new' media literacy, a debate which results from the intersection of two phenomena: the inevitable standardization of topics and instructional approaches resulting from more widespread

local implementation in schools and the rapidly changing digital landscape, which has led to an explosion of new forms of online social interaction and cultural participation. Then, I address the longstanding debate concerning the appropriate role of media and technology companies in their efforts to support media literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy financially. Finally, I examine a newly emerging political view which positions media literacy as an approach that minimizes the need for government regulation of the mass media, a perspective now emerging in Great Britain, the USA and other nations.

## DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES EXPAND AND DIVIDE

Four distinct approaches have been termed *media literacy*, *information or ICT literacy*, *critical literacy*, and *media management*. While all approaches conceptualize literacy as the ability to use digital tools effectively and to apply critical thinking skills to media and popular culture texts, they differ in their focus in several ways, emphasizing digital technologies and workplace skills, genres of mass media and popular culture, the identification of sociopolitical contexts and resistance to inequitable power relationships, and media consumption in the context of the home and family. There are a number of differing terms used to refer to the processes involved in critically analyzing and creating media and technology messages. The term *critical viewing skills* had been used as a synonym until the mid-1980s, but it has gradually faded from general use. Other terms now in use include *media education*, *visual literacy*, *technology literacy*, *critical literacy*, *critical media literacy*, *youth media*, *media competence*, *cyberliteracy*, *media management*, *multimodal literacy* and others.

Over the past 10 years there has been a dramatic expansion of this work through practical program development and implementation, theoretical and empirical research, and advocacy (Schwartz and Brown, 2005).

There are important differences among these conceptualizations of literacy in their relative emphasis on the author, reader or the text, in the emphasis on the socio-historical and political contexts in which production and reception takes place, in the pedagogical issues concerning the power/authority relationship between teacher and learner, in specific positions on particular social, political and regulatory issues, and on questions concerning the media's impact on child health and behavior. There are also key differences in their orientation towards particular media forms, with differential emphasis on the internet, print media, popular culture and visual media (Meyrowitz, 1998; DiSessa, 2000). Tyner's (1998) distinction between these different visions of literacy as 'tool-literacies' or 'literacies of representation' still characterizes an essential distinction among the different approaches. Sonia Livingstone (2003) has pointed out that the new literacies differ in their aims and goals: some approaches reinforce existing institutional practices and values and others aim to challenge and transform them. Four of the new literacies are highlighted below in order to illustrate some of the ongoing tensions, contradictions and differences between them.

*Information literacy/ICT literacy.* Educators who adopt the term *information literacy* or *ICT literacy* center upon non-fiction texts and position technology-centered research skills as a key component of literacy. These skills are emerging within a world economy based increasingly on the effective use of information and communication. These scholars and educators emphasize the idea that new literacies build upon (and do not replace) reading, writing, speaking and listening skills; the focus instead is on an examination of how these practices take new forms when texts are combined with images, graphics, sound and linked within complex social and information networks. While during the 1970s and 1980s information literacy was promulgated primarily by librarians and the business community (Kapitzke, 2003), a number of scholars specializing in the use of technology in English-language arts



have added their voices to this perspective (Hagood *et al.*, 2003; Kinzer and Leander, 2003). As a result, ICT literacy is conceptualized with a focus on both tool literacies and literacies of representation.

Table 25.1 shows a list of skills measured in the ICT literacy assessment developed by the Educational Testing Service (2004), and the strategic blending of technical skills and critical thinking skills is evident. But although the language of scholars emphasizes critical thinking, technical proficiency takes center stage at the school level (Andrews, 2004). Why? Because different forms of technology contain different contexts and resources for constructing meaning; people need the practical knowledge gained from using technology tools in order to make effective use of the information resources

**Table 25.1 Cognitive and technical skills measured by the ICT literacy assessment (Educational Testing Service, 2004)**

<i>Define:</i>	the ability to use ICT tools to identify and represent an information need (asking questions, completing a concept map)
<i>Access:</i>	the ability to collect and identify likely digital information sources and get information from those sources (browsing linked websites, searching through databases)
<i>Manage:</i>	the ability to organize and classify digital information (sorting information using specific criteria, re-ordering information from a table)
<i>Integrate:</i>	the ability to interpret and represent information (comparing and contrasting information from IMs and web pages)
<i>Evaluate:</i>	the ability to judge the authority, point of view/bias and accuracy of digital information (determining relevance, ranking web pages in terms of specific criteria)
<i>Create:</i>	the ability to generate information by adapting, applying, designing or inventing information using ICT tools (creating a graph that supports a point of view)
<i>Communicate:</i>	the ability to express ideas by gearing information to a particular audience and medium (adapting presentation slides, formatting a document, preparing a text message for a cell phone)

available (Goodwyn, 2000). Practitioners and observers in elementary and secondary schools often see students in English or Social Studies classes learning to use I-movie software for video editing, or mastering the finer dimensions of PowerPoint to create elaborate, often animated visual materials to support oral presentations. ICT literacy advocates see this as the ideal way to integrate technology into the classroom. Critics of this approach fear that the emphasis on mastering the software encourages students to emphasize superficial qualities like image and appearance over content and ideas; others argue that a focus on technical skills is essentially supplanting humanistic education with an industrial skills orientation as a means to cultivate technologically sophisticated workers (Oppenheimer, 2003). According to critics, involvement of the business community will risk appropriation by its focus on 'workplace productivity and the absence of a social justice agenda' (Kellner and Share, 2005: 381).

*Media literacy.* Those who use the term *media literacy* or *media education* emphasize an understanding of mass media and popular culture, particularly news, advertising, entertainment and popular culture. Media literacy is defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms. This definition arose in the early 1990s as media literacy educators from across the USA gathered at the Aspen Institute for a leadership conference on media literacy (Aufderheide and Firestone, 1993). The term *access* generally means the ability to locate information or find messages and to be able to comprehend and interpret a message's meaning. *Analysis* refers to the process of recognizing and examining the author's purpose, target audience, construction techniques, symbol systems and technologies used to construct the message. The concept of analysis also includes the ability to appreciate the political, economic, social and historical context in which media messages are produced and circulated as part of a cultural system. *Evaluation* refers to the process of assessing the veracity,

authenticity, creativity or other qualities of a media message, making judgments about a message's worth or value. Finally, the definition of media literacy includes the ability to *communicate* messages in a wide variety of forms (using language, photography, video, online media, etc.). Media literacy emphasizes the ability to use production processes to compose and create messages using various symbol systems and technology tools.

Media literacy is primarily conceptualized as a learning outcome within an educational framework that aims to give children and young people opportunities to learn about mass media, popular culture, and communication technologies, although the term is sometimes used in relation to larger theories about the relationship between literacy, visual media, and technology (Kress, 2003). *Media literacy education* (or *media education*) is a term used to refer to the pedagogical processes used to develop media literacy (Buckingham, 2003).

Unlike ICT literacy, media literacy educators distinctively focus on mass media and popular culture. There is a focus on the processes involved in analyzing, evaluating and constructing news, advertising and entertainment media, with explicit examination of the stance of the persons producing the message. Similarly, the audience is conceived of as a construction that exists within a particular economic, political and cultural framework. Media literacy educators see collaborative student-centered media production activities as a key dimension of pedagogy and emphasize how the practice of critical analysis of popular culture alters the power dynamic in the student-teacher relationship (Alvermann, 2002; Buckingham, 2003; Hagood *et al.*, 2003; Hobbs, 2004).

However, teachers' longstanding antipathy towards the use of popular culture texts in the classroom limits implementation of media literacy in educational settings in the USA, Britain and in many other nations, as teachers fear, for example, that children will prefer acting out dramatic scenes featuring Jennifer Lopez and the Spice Girls instead of characters from *Little Women*, resulting in

a loss of focus on literary works (Pailliotet, 2003; Felini, 2004; Marsh, 2006). Justin Lewis and Sut Jhally (1998) criticize media literacy for being too focused on textual analysis to the detriment of explorations of sociopolitical dimensions of media's social functions in maintaining hegemony.

*Critical literacy.* Scholars who conceptualize their work through the lens of *critical literacy* (or *critical media literacy*) distinguish between operational, cultural and critical literacies. The operational dimension of literacy emphasizes the medium of the language system; the cultural dimension focuses on the production and circulation of meaning; and the critical dimension is concerned with the socially constructed cultural system which privileges some perspectives and marginalizes others (Lankshear and Knobel, 1998). Advocates of critical literacy use the perspectives of critical and cultural studies as a means to strengthen young people's commitment to radical democratic social transformation. Because literacy is embedded within social and political contexts, literacy practices inevitably embody power relationships within society. When we interpret media messages, our interpretation is partly individual, but it also reflects our positions as readers: our age, race, gender, social class and family backgrounds. 'Multimedia literacy ... will always be a social process with repercussions for the transformation of society itself' (Martin and Hottmann, 2003: 75). Through both reading and writing of multimodal texts, critical literacy encourages students to recognize and resist the ideological framing embedded in texts that position readers as subjects and construct social reality through inclusions and exclusions. As Lankshear and Knobel (1998: 1) point out, 'Critical readings of texts aim to unveil the representational and other material effects of texts, and critical rewritings of texts are "moves" to redress these effects by encoding alternative possibilities'.

Critical media literacy involves analyzing media culture as products of social production and teaching students to be critical of media representations, but it also stresses 'the importance of learning to use the media as

modes of self-expression and social activism' (Kellner and Share, 2005: 369). For example, some critical media literacy educators in the USA have been active in the media reform movement, which is an international interest-group coalition seeking to decrease the centralization of corporate ownership of media outlets and increase support for public broadcasting, independent/alternative media and cable access (Johnson, 2003). Rather than merely indulging in textualist readings or audience studies of how people use and enjoy popular culture, scholars who emphasize critical literacy target the corporations who circulate messages that reinforce capitalism's status quo. These educators see media culture as a dangerous form of pedagogy in itself and encourage educators to see themselves as responsible for helping nurture a kind of cultural criticism that will enable young people to recognize and resist the political functions of popular culture which stimulate and manufacture desires (Giroux, 2003).

Critics of critical literacy point out its highly theoretical dimensions and its problematic pedagogy (Buckingham, 1998). They point out that critical literacy educators tend to situate the teacher as hero, the 'only individual in the classroom who has achieved critical consciousness and whose job it now is to enlighten his or her students so that they can be transformed and emancipated' (Guerra, 2004: 21). Even when teachers are self-conscious and reflective, 'it does not take long for "empowered" students to become disempowered when they begin their quest for employment in a world where "marketable skills" are both preferred and financially rewarded over "critical skills"' (Frechette, 2002: 111).

*Media management.* Scholars and researchers with interests in youth, media and public health sometimes resist the conceptualization of media literacy as a new type of literacy or a particular approach to pedagogy, preferring to conceptualize media literacy as a *treatment* or *intervention* to counteract negative media effects. Such work can promote critical thinking about the dominance of media consumption as a

lifestyle and the role of media messages in glamorizing unhealthy behaviors, including violence, substance abuse, adolescent sexuality or the consumption of high-fat foods. During the 1990s in the USA, Great Britain, Italy and other nations, this approach focused on informing parents and the general public about issues related to the uses of television and the internet in the family, encouraging parents to develop responsible viewing habits by using the TV, videogame, and film ratings systems and establishing limitations on time and type of programming (Steyer, 2002). Sometimes termed *media management*, this perspective emphasizes the importance of transforming passive, habitual media use into intentional, active and strategic use as a response to the negative dimensions of mass media and popular culture.

Pediatricians and other child health advocates almost universally believe that children's media use negatively affects children's aggressive behavior, eating habits, physical activity levels, risk for obesity, high-risk behaviors, and school performance (Gentile *et al.*, 2004). As a result, a 2001 policy statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics provided specific recommendations for pediatricians to incorporate media education and advocacy into their anticipatory guidance and parental education. Recommendations advise parents (1) to limit children's media time, (2) to discourage television viewing among children under age two, and (3) to encourage alternative entertainment for children. A survey of pediatricians in one state showed that pediatricians perceive a lack of parental motivation or support for the recommendations, with approximately one-third of pediatricians also citing a lack of time and a sense of futility in affecting patients' media habits (Gentile *et al.*, 2004).

Critics of media management fear that it positions children and youth as victims of an oppressive media culture without an appropriate level of attention to the pleasures of media consumption (Hobbs, 1998). Others object to the practice of medical professionals who position themselves as arbiters of appropriate media content for

children and youth. Many dispute the use of social science research methods to investigate the complexities of people's relationship with media messages, as researchers must inevitably use oversimplified measurement tools and theoretical models (Barker and Petley, 1997; Buckingham, 2003). According to this view, researchers abuse the public's trust in science when they claim that children's media consumption is associated with public health problems like attention-deficit disorder, obesity, and aggression.

It is important to note that these four approaches to new literacies frame up very different 'problems' that can be 'solved' through the application of critical analysis and media production skills training for children and youth. Conceptualized as a tool, different stakeholders can use new literacies for building workplace productivity, responding to mass media and popular culture, resisting media hegemony, or minimizing the negative effects of media influence. Each of these goals resonates with (or alienates) specific individuals and groups in society. Fortunately, there are some points of consensus evident in reviewing the four different approaches to new literacies. Despite their differences, to some extent these approaches all acknowledge three broad themes:

- 1 The constructed nature both of authorship and of audiences within an economic, political and sociocultural context.
- 2 The circulation of messages and meanings, and the relative contribution of audience interpretation and specific features of message design, format and content.
- 3 An exploration of questions about how texts represent social realities, reflect ideologies, and influence perception, attitudes and behaviors about the social world and one's place in it (Hobbs, 2006).

Some effort is underway among policymakers to unify these different approaches both in Europe and the USA. Many politicians are using elements of all four discourses simultaneously to appeal to diverse stakeholders. For example, a recent declaration from the

Council of Europe was issued supporting the needs of children in the new information and communications environment. It uses arguments representing all four of the conceptualizations of new literacy outlined above (Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, 2006). In the USA, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, an advocacy organization supported by the federal government, educational leaders, and technology corporations, has focused on providing resources to educational leaders to help integrate the various conceptualizations of new literacies into K-12 education, even while privileging the perspective of ICT literacy (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2002).

Whether these four discourses will continue to thrive, merge or compete for limited resources over the next 10 years is unclear. Whereas in 1998 the 'great debates' in media literacy centered on the tensions between *protectionist* educators whose concerns about the toxicity of media's cultural environment and others who emphasized student *empowerment*, the current situation is made more complex because of the four perspectives just described, each with its own proponents, scholarly literature, conferences, and practitioner base. It is difficult for academic specialists to keep up with the increasingly vast literature emerging from even one of these four approaches. There is some evidence that disciplines are encouraging cross-fertilization, as in the USA, where public health researchers oriented towards media management make use of theoretical models of media literacy (Primack *et al.*, 2006). During the 1990s, I imagined that the media literacy movement was a 'big tent' where people with a wide range of different approaches could share ideas (Hobbs, 1998). Today, there are a number of different tents, each offering more or less the same set of tools, but making different claims about the values and benefits of their use. Paradoxically, the disciplinary specialization and competing visions about the aims and goals for new literacies may serve both to broaden the scope of public support and potentially to decrease the coherence and clarity of its aims and goals.



## DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF YOUTH MEDIA PRODUCTION PROGRAMS

In the USA, Great Britain and many other nations, there has been an explosion of initiatives that involve young people in creating media and technology programs. Within this community of practitioners, there is tension concerning the aims, goals and practices of this work. In many Western nations, *youth media* programs are widespread. In the USA, Listen Up! (2006) lists 118 organizational members consisting of diverse groups with a wide range of aims, goals, target participants and audiences, and instructional philosophies. Some examples from the USA illustrate the diversity of programs. Swept Away TV is a public access television program in the state of Florida that is written, edited, filmed and directed by college and high-school students, where productions feature performances by local bands and where media career training and mentoring is available for young people. The Media Lab at Mountain Lake PBS, located in rural New York State, is a community outreach program of a local public broadcasting affiliate which offers media training to at-risk teens in collaboration with the local housing authority. There is comparable diversity of such youth media programs now emerging in Austria, Germany, England, Australia and other nations (Buckingham and Domaille, 2002; European Charter for Media Literacy, 2006). Such programs may be sponsored by nonprofit youth-serving organizations, federal, state and local agencies, media and technology professionals, artists, activists, public, cable or commercial broadcasters, and business entrepreneurs.

As with the various approaches to new literacies in the context of school-based programs, the primary challenge of youth media programs relates to our still-limited understanding of the benefits of these programs in the lives of children and youth. As a result of its confusing theory base, which includes elements from developmental psychology, social work, and education (Tyner, 1999), some have claimed that the lack

of research has limited the momentum in the field.

A significant reason for the lack of research is the field's straddling and marginal position within the fields of both media studies and education (Hobbs, 1994; Hagood *et al.*, 2003; Mihailidis, 2006). However, the most experienced practitioners have made important contributions to our knowledge of youth media programs through qualitative, ethnographic reports of practice (Sefton-Green and Sinker, 2000; Goodman, 2003; Jeffers and Streit, 2003). While program evaluation is embraced by researchers, policy-makers and funders as a means to strengthen the knowledge base of the field, there has been some resistance among youth media nonprofits to complete evaluations, which are at times treated as an arduous chore. Among small grassroots organizations with few staff, evaluation is sometimes viewed as something to add on at the end of a proposal to justify the funding. The impetus for evaluation is often external, since youth media practitioners are 'true believers,' already convinced of the value of media production for young people and not feeling that evaluation enhances their work (Campbell *et al.*, 2001; Jeffers and Streit, 2003). Some funders have complained that youth media programs use a bean-counting approach, specifying the number of young people who attended and the number of after-school sessions offered with little identification of outcomes or goals.

In addition, there is some tension regarding the relative emphasis of *product and process* among youth media educators and their funders. Some educators value the educational process of learning to compose using media tools and technologies over the ultimate quality of the video or multimedia product actually produced, while funders tend to value the distribution of a quality production as an important benchmark. According to Robert Sherman of the Surdna Foundation:

To produce media that is not seen, read, heard or experienced doesn't get at the great benefit of what youth media has to offer – which is young people communicating about issues that are important in

their lives. The goal of making media and finding voice is to be heard (Hahn, 2002: 1).

But when product is valued over process, then adults take greater responsibility for youth media productions, shifting the balance between youth and adults and raising questions about authorship and student learning. When there is pressure to create media products suitable for community audiences, the responsibility for quality control is placed more firmly in the hands of the staff. Rather than use digital media as a tool for discovery, experimentation and inquiry, some programs use an 'artist-in-residence' model, where an experienced multimedia professional guides young people in apprenticeship fashion. In these programs, artists or teachers may orchestrate much of the content and tone of the production. Students get to brainstorm ideas, perform in front of the camera, learn to conduct an interview, or use the lighting and camera equipment, but adults do most of the concept planning and production logistics. In many programs, adults take responsibility for the editing process as well. At youth media festivals and screenings, one can often overhear suspicious muttering about

a production that looks too professional to have been done by youths themselves. These sources of tension will be resolved as research is better able to contribute to our understanding of how different approaches to youth media production best support and enhance the development of young people intellectually, socially and emotionally.

Internationally, the youth media field has begun to recognize the need to articulate a shared set of aims and goals and devote increased attention to the process of evaluation (Sefton-Green *et al.*, 1995; Buckingham and Domaille, 2002). In the United States, Tony Streit and his colleagues at the Education Development Center and the leaders of 14 youth media programs developed four broad categories that represent a kind of 'fluency' in youth media. Using a consensus-based process with an expert base of youth media practitioners, they identified four primary learning outcomes for youth media programs, as shown on Table 25.2.

These include: (1) positive youth development; (2) technical and creative skills; (3) critical media analysis; and (4) civic engagement and activism (Jeffers and Streit, 2003). It is not clear whether the systematic measurement

**Table 25.2 Primary outcomes for youth media programs (Education Development Center, 2006)**

Positive youth development	Technical and creative skills	Critical media analysis	Civic engagement and activism
Life skills, personal responsibility, confidence, assertiveness, open-mindedness	Hard skills with various media-making tools and formats	Awareness of media landscape, what kind of media is out there, how they are put together, how one consumes it	Finding your voice, representing oneself, being honest and authentic
Collaboration, teamwork, interpersonal skills	Awareness of how media works are put together	Look at media with a critical eye, sifting and analyzing messages	Work mirrors social issues and issues of personal significance
Risk-taking, being curious/curiosity	Writing skills, organizing ideas, interactive/virtual communication skills	How they consume media, not just how much-scale, content, how often	
Working in a diverse setting, learning to talk about differences	Comfort in interviewing and being interviewed	Finding one's place as a media maker	Developing perspective and taking actions based on one's opinion/interests
Effective communication, confidence to express ideas in a group setting, able to give and receive feedback	Prioritizing tasks, operating on timeline, following through, self-direction	Exploring the impact of their own media on others	Aware of community needs and issues, relevant/contextual content, cultural literacy

of these outcomes will continue to develop as youth media programs develop; typically, leaders of youth media programs match program aims to the specific needs of the target population; as such, there may continue to be enormous variation in the design, implementation and assessment of these programs.

### **OLD MEDIA LITERACY VERSUS NEW MEDIA LITERACY**

In the USA, Canada, Australia, Great Britain and other nations, media literacy has become established enough that there exists a set of now-conventional content, themes, materials and instructional methods that are becoming normative. For example, in New Zealand, high-school students are offered a Media Studies course where they investigate how news stories are selected and packaged, explore how ethical issues affect the media, and strengthen writing skills by producing messages in print, radio and video formats (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2007). Educational standards in most US states now call for students to be able to, for example, 'analyze media as sources of information, entertainment, persuasion, interpretation of events and transmission of culture' (California Department of Education, 2005). The vast majority of media literacy practitioners (particularly in school settings) include a focus on news, advertising (particularly tobacco and alcohol marketing) and popular film and television. Certain instructional practices are also typical: (1) reflection on the process of home media management; (2) message analysis or deconstruction of media texts; (3) media composition/production activities; and (4) the exploration of media and society issues, including topics such as propaganda in war coverage; advertising and materialism; stereotyping and issues of representation; alcohol and tobacco advertising; media ownership; media violence; media's impact on body image, sexuality and self-esteem; and the role of the First Amendment in contemporary society

(Hobbs, 2004; Thoman and Jolls, 2005). At the primary level, media literacy tends to focus on home media management, where students compile 'media diaries' and have 'TV turn-off weeks'. At the high-school level, English, Social Studies, Communication or Health teachers (many of whom face upwards of 120 students per day) manage the demands of the job by employing a set of standard lessons, videotapes, and activities that can be used year after year, sometimes even after these materials have lost their relevance to students' lived experience (Hobbs, 2007).

But some scholars claim that these now-standard practices of creating media diaries, analyzing news and advertising, and creating video documentaries no longer map onto the rapidly changing technological environment of the 21st century. The prevalence of broadband internet access has increased the scope of ordinary users' online activity; many are actively involved in creating diverse new sorts of texts using creative remixing and editing techniques. Educators are just beginning to explore what it means to build critical thinking and communication skills around these new online genres and digital media forms, like instant messaging, social networking software, blogs, podcasts and user-modified videogames, where user-generated content and participation are central (Lewis and Fabos, 2005; Shaffer *et al.*, 2005).

Remixing is now becoming a dominant form of self-expression and communication, and some argue that media literacy must position itself in relation to these new production practices. For example, commercial advertisers have invited viewers to create TV ads for their products and post them online (Pfanter, 2006). Iraqi teenagers are creating blogs that capture the trials of daily life in Baghdad as they live with an ongoing war all around them, using clips from television, images, the sounds of local news, and their own writing and artwork (HNC, 2006). Educators are modifying videogames to add educational content to formerly shoot-em-up scenarios to teach science or social studies (Squire and Jenkins, 2004). Rather than continuing to focus on the top-down model

that positions 'authors' as those in corporate profit-centered media institutions who create messages for mass audiences, educators are beginning to celebrate the increasing convergence between authors and audiences, where meanings emerge collaboratively as people sample, appropriate and repurpose media texts within and among knowledge-sharing communities (Hagood *et al.*, 2003; Jenkins, 2006b).

For example, the scholarship on fan fiction suggests that young people who write stories, scripts or create videos featuring their favorite media characters may be developing important media literacy skills in the process. Henry Jenkins argues that students' appropriation of existing media content in their own creative work may be understood as a process which involves both analysis and commentary:

Sampling intelligently from the existing cultural reservoir requires a close analysis of existing structures and uses of this material; remixing requires an appreciation of emerging structures and latent potential meanings. Often, remixing involves the creative juxtaposition of materials which otherwise occupy very different cultural niches (Jenkins, 2006a: xx).

It may be that remixing production activities provide a kind of intellectual scaffolding for the development of students' imagination that reduces anxiety about the writing process. For example, children can use a drag-and-drop editing tool to explore how a palette of existing images can be manipulated and recombined to communicate new and different meanings. This activity has key parallels to the sequential processes involved in learning to write a well-developed paragraph. The tool can support students' learning about the role of sequence in the construction of meaning.

But skeptics wonder whether such new teaching approaches are reasonable, given teachers' longstanding antipathy to popular culture and new technology; current approaches to staff development and an aging work force are also complicating factors. In the USA, education schools on college and university campuses are among the least technologically sophisticated among departments (George Lucas Educational

Foundation, 2001). Few teachers are evaluated on their ability to use technology in the classroom, despite the fact that large amounts of financial resources are dedicated to placing technology in schools. A recent study found that only one in five districts include technology skills as a criterion for evaluating K-12 teacher performance (Whale, 2006). For most teachers, videogames, instant messaging and social networking websites are viewed with suspicion; word processing, email, and the use of search engines represent the extent of their experience with computer technology.

Thus, educators and other stakeholders wonder whether K-12 schools are up to the challenge of implementing new media literacy. This remains just as vital and significant a debate in 2006 as it was in 1998, continuing the tension between the positions of scholars who point out the active way teachers resist media and technology (Cuban, 2001; Demetriadis *et al.*, 2003; Oppenheimer, 2003) and those who showcase the rich array of potential learning opportunities that new media literacy can provide (Brunner and Tally, 1999; Martin and Hottmann, 2003; Lewis and Fabos, 2005). But a vision of the entrenched, conservative nature of schools and schooling vastly overgeneralizes the more complex and dynamic reality of education, both in the USA and in many European nations. Each year, more and more teachers are becoming comfortable with the internet and making more active use of it in the classroom. Blogs, digital cameras and video editing tools are not as intimidating to the newest generation of teachers just beginning their careers. Many public and private schools are now using a number of innovative instructional practices involving multimedia production that are contributing to the intellectual, social and cognitive skills required for 21st century participatory culture. These include collaborative learning, project-based multimedia production, critical reading of digital texts, and writing for authentic audiences. A new generation of teachers is experimenting with new forms and genres to discover the opportunities and challenges of implementing a new vision of literacy.

## THE ROLE OF MEDIA CORPORATIONS IN MEDIA LITERACY

The debate about the appropriate role of media companies in supporting the media literacy movement was a major conflict of the 1990s, leading to the creation of two competing national membership organizations in the USA (Heins and Cho, 2003). Although it remains a vociferous argument among American educators, it is unclear how this argument resonates internationally, where K-12 education is more institutionally centralized and uniformly funded and public broadcasters have more actively embraced their responsibilities to promote their educational mission.

While some American educators view media companies as having a social responsibility to contribute to people's ability to understand, analyze and create media messages, others feel that such involvement is destined to co-opt the movement and eliminate critical perspectives (Hobbs, 1998). The Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA) believes that effective media education requires broad support. Its founding sponsors included both the nonprofit educational television company Sesame Workshop and the corporate media entities AOL Time Warner, Fox Family Channel, and the Discovery Channel. The backers of its founding conference in 2001 included the New York Times Foundation, the educational publishing house Holt, Rinehart and Winston, a government agency (the National Endowment for the Arts), a nonprofit company (Media Education Foundation) and an educational institution (the College of Communication at the University of Texas). Its website states:

We believe that corporations, especially media corporations, have a social responsibility to support media literacy. If we deny them the opportunity to do so and then criticize them for not doing so, we create a no-win situation, both for them and for the potential beneficiaries of their efforts.

Educators and scholars who were opposed to this vision created the Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME) in reaction

to the AMLA founding conference in 2001, which was the fifth US meeting organized nationally during the significant growth experienced in the media literacy community during the 1990s. ACME's explicit purpose is to use media education to deal with corporate censorship, racism, commercialism in the schools, news monopolies and the misrepresentation of women and minorities. As reported in *The Nation* magazine, 'leading media scholars and educators are forming a new progressive media literacy organization, one that will remain independent of media conglomerates that bankroll existing groups' (McChesney and Nichols, 2002: 17). Since its founding conference in October 2002, ACME has participated in a number of grassroots campaigns, including the massive national effort to urge the Federal Communications Commission not to eliminate its limitations on media ownership. Its mission statement emphasizes: (1) teaching media literacy skills to children and adults so they can become more critical media consumers and active citizens; (2) championing a wide array of independent media voices; and (3) democratizing our media system through political reform.

It doesn't appear that questions about corporate funding resonate in other nations with the same vitriol evident in the USA. In Great Britain, a media literacy curriculum for elementary educators entitled *Media Smart* was funded by a consortium of corporate funders including the British Toy and Hobby Association, Lego, Proctor & Gamble, Kellogg's, and Cadbury (*Media Smart*, 2006). *Media Smart* included three curriculum packages for elementary teachers in England, Scotland and Wales with accompanying print, video and internet support materials designed to teach children ages 6-11 about advertising. This effort largely escaped criticism, perhaps because of the involvement of key academics and support from government agencies.

In the USA, the public nature of debates about sources of funding may have contributed to perceptions among the philanthropic community that media literacy educators were not ready for prime time. Corporate philanthropies like AOL Time



Warner and the George Lucas Educational Foundation have supported specific youth media programs but preferred to focus on the development of ICT literacy. Only recently have major philanthropies begun to invest in new literacies, as demonstrated by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's recent grants of more than US\$4 million to universities and non-profit organizations in 2005.

More broadly, questions of profit have affected the creation and distribution of media literacy resource materials. In the USA, media professionals and educators are concerned about whether the use of copyrighted materials, used as part of media literacy education, is legal within current US copyright regulations. Such regulations evaluate the 'fair use' of copyrighted materials based on four criteria, including the commercial or noncommercial nature and usage (Center for Social Media, 2006). It is not known whether or how concerns about copyright violation have affected creation and distribution of media literacy curriculum materials. However, a few educational publishers have created textbooks, videos and ancillary materials for integrating media literacy into the primary and secondary English curriculum and some large textbook publishers have avoided the use of copyrighted materials.

Ironically, in 2006 it was the *lack* of media literacy in a particular set of curriculum materials published by a media corporation that contributed to a controversy, when the US television network ABC aired *The Path to 9/11*, a 5-hour docudrama written by Cyrus Nowrasteh, dramatizing the 1993 and 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the US government's response. An educational publishing company, Scholastic, joined with ABC to co-release a teaching guide, which was delivered to more than 25,000 high-school teachers with activities and lessons on using the docudrama in the classroom. Concerns were raised about the misinformation and inaccuracy in the docudrama; former 9/11 Commissioners, former administration officials, prominent historians, and even conservative pundits called the

show an undisguised form of conservative propaganda. The educational materials also came under heavy criticism for its assumptions about the Iraq War, drawing fire from bloggers by including a suggested question asking students to debate whether 'the media help or hinder our national security'. When Scholastic pulled the discussion guide from its website, it released a statement introducing new materials to accompany the miniseries. These materials focused specifically on media literacy and critical thinking. Said Dick Robinson, Chairman, President and CEO of Scholastic:

We believe that developing critical thinking and media literacy skills is crucial for students in today's society in order to participate fully in our democracy and that a program such as *The Path to 9/11* provides a very 'teachable moment' for developing these skills at the high school level. We encourage teachers not to shy away from the controversy surrounding the program, but rather to engage their students in meaningful, in-depth discussion (Rood, 2006: 1).

Media corporations may be becoming more adept at recognizing the value of being able to claim that they are promoting media literacy at times when their judgments fall under public scrutiny. It remains to be seen how financial support from media corporations will be perceived by educators and scholars from among the four emerging perspectives articulated earlier, but it is reasonable to anticipate that those with primary orientations towards critical literacy will continue to resist the efforts of media corporations, while those who favor ICT literacy will seek out opportunities to collaborate with media corporations and extend their influence.

## **MEDIA LITERACY AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO MEDIA REGULATION**

In the UK, media literacy has recently been positioned as a means to transform relationship between the media industry, the public and the national government. When the British government decided to reorganize

the regulatory bodies that relate to broadcast and electronic media (except for the BBC), they created a new authority, the Office of Communications (Ofcom). Despite their comparatively limited regulatory role, the Communications Act of 2003 gave Ofcom responsibility for media literacy. This was the first time that any statutory body in the world had been given explicit powers for anything to do with media education (Bazalgette, in press).

In the USA, media literacy has also been positioned by media industry leaders and government officials as an alternative to regulation. For example, the National Cable Television Association, the industry lobbying organization, developed a three-part video designed especially for children ages 5–7, 8–11 and 12–17, providing an introduction to media literacy. Members of Congress joined cable industry executives at a nationally televised press conference, the premier event for the first National Critical Viewing Day in 1998. (However, the US Federal Communications Commission has been utterly silent on the topic.) In 2006, a major public service promotional campaign was initiated by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the organization that rates Hollywood films, and the Ad Council, the leader producer of public service announcements in the USA. The campaign, entitled 'TV Boss', has a media management focus and is aimed to empower parents to take charge of what they and their children see on TV (Ad Council, 2006). According to Jack Valenti, former MPAA head:

You don't want government stepping in to do this. I'm an implacable enemy of the government trying to tell parents how to raise their children, what they should read or where to go to school, or how they should conduct themselves. This is parental responsibility (KUHf Houston Public Radio, 2006: 1).

A newly emerging tension pits those who see media literacy as an 'alternative to the blunderbuss of media regulation' (Silverstone, 2004: 447) against those who object to that an educational effort is being positioned as replacing the need for media deregulation.

Media literacy makes viewers and listeners responsible for informing themselves of television and radio content in order to avoid harmful or offensive content. The British media activist group MediaWatch-UK points out that, despite the high levels of interest in media literacy among members of Parliament, British media regulators don't emphasize the process of teaching viewers and listeners how to *respond* to harmful or offensive content (MediaWatch-UK, 2006). As Livingstone (2003: xx) puts it, media literacy 'may be promoted as individual empowerment but clearly it enables the state to roll back its own responsibilities'. Whether media literacy is actually expanded as a result of new approaches to government regulation of media, or whether it remains simply a bureaucratic cover for an emphasis on industry self-regulation and limiting government's role, is yet to be seen.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a review and analysis of some of the conflicts and tensions now emerging as a result of changing conceptualization of literacy. New visions of literacy now include perspectives from education practitioners, scholars in communication, technology and education, government leaders, public health and medical professionals, and members of the business community. Some of the tensions and conflicts center on the purposes and aims of new literacies. As youth media programs expand around the globe, practitioners and scholars question the aims, goals and assessment methodologies used to evaluate these programs. The appropriate role of critical theory for the development of the field continues to be debated among practitioners, scholars and advocates. As media literacy becomes somewhat more established in the K-12 curriculum, there is concern about how the field will adapt to include the increasingly participatory culture of the internet in relation to social networking tools and online gaming. Tensions continue about the appropriate role of educational

publishers and multimedia corporations in the media literacy movement. Finally, both international governments and global media corporations are reconceptualizing media literacy as an alternative to government regulation of media content, an approach that creates tensions between educators, activists and policymakers concerning the fundamental nature of media literacy and its purpose and function in society.

We face the new millennium with our websites, blogs, voice mail, email, I-Movies, IMs, I-Tunes, podcasts, webcasts, DVDs, online comics, electronic magazines, e-books, online multiplayer games and cellphones all offering more and more choices of entertainment and information, shifting old conceptualizations of author and audience, of mainstream and alternative media. These new choices take us beyond the already vast offerings of television, movies, newspapers, books, magazines and radio. Our knowledge of the role of these new genres, tools and technologies in shaping literacy practices will grow only as a result of some significant investment on behalf of scholars and educational practitioners from a wide variety of disciplines and specializations. By contributing our diverse voices to the next round of 'great debates' and continuing to respect the vitality of cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship and reflective practice, we are beginning to develop an understanding of literacy's function in relation to new media and technologies. The implementation of new forms of literacy education in schools, at home, and after school are certain to affect the intellectual, social and emotional development of children and youth.

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