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Abstract

The phrase "think global, act local" is used to frame the macro efforts of information literacy worldwide alongside the localized, grassroots efforts of media literacy education in the United States where there exists a complex and contradictory relationship among government, technology industry, and educational practices. This article marries the global (macro) push for information literacy with the localized (micro) efforts at media literacy education in the United States and identifies emergent tensions and challenges associated with the production of information literate citizens within an educational system that is disconnected from the highly mediated lives of students outside of school. As a microcosm of this struggle, the article chronicles the emergence of the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE).

Introduction

The phrase "think global, act local" has been used for decades as a mantra for environmental conservation and ironically also as a motto for globalization of business and industry. Its core principle—that collective action of individuals and communities can change the world—is a powerful and prevalent one among the millennial generation (those born between 1982 and 2003) in the United States. Ninety-four percent of millennials in the United States believe that service to one's local community is an effective way to solve the nation's problems (Winograd & Hais, 2009). Millennials are increasingly socially connected through Facebook and MySpace. The political magnitude of this twenty-first century technology infrastructure, which can immediately decentralize information across the world, can be felt in the grassroots leveraging of Twitter during the 2010 Iran elec-

tions and the 2011 riots in Egypt. The continuous flow of user-generated content via the Internet has magnified the principle of enacting a vision globally through local efforts. There exists, in the United States, a complex and even contradictory relationship among technology infrastructures and its citizenry. As the richest country in the world with the largest and most technologically powerful economy in the world (http://www.cia.gov), the United States is experiencing what President Barack Obama called a "crisis of authenticity" and the need "to recognize the important role information plays in our daily lives, and appreciate the need for a greater understanding of its impact" (2009, §2). In 2009, Obama declared October as National Information Literacy Awareness Month and called upon libraries and universities, among other institutions, to help Americans "separate truth from fiction and signal from noise" (§6). Among a series of white papers, the Knight Commission in 2010 released *Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action* which defines digital and media literacy as "a constellation of life skills that are necessary for full participation in our media-saturated, information-rich society" (Hobbs, 2010, p. vii). Among the specific competencies called for is the ability to "create content in a variety of forms, making use of language, images, sound, and new digital tools and technologies" (p. viii). This article marries the global (macro) push for information literacy with the localized (micro) efforts at media literacy education in the United States and identifies emergent tensions and challenges associated with the production of information literate citizens within an educational system that is disconnected from the highly mediated lives of students outside of school. As a microcosm of this struggle, the article chronicles the emergence of the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) and identifies ways in which libraries and out of school programs might enact the global vision of information literacy while mobilizing young people as local agents of change.

The Marriage of Information and Media Literacy

Information literacy has long been associated with the basic universal human right to learn (Shapiro & Hughes, 1996). It is generally associated with secondary and higher education in the contexts of school, public, and university libraries. The profession is well-established worldwide. The International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA), established in 1927, is the "global voice of the library and information profession" with members from 150 countries around the world. The IFLA established an InfoLit Global Web portal (http://www.infolitglobal.info/en/) where librarians and educators worldwide can engage in knowledge networking through online collaboration and sharing of resources. In 2003, *The Prague Declaration: "Towards an Information Literate Society"* was crafted at the Information Literacy Meeting of Experts (organized by the U.S. National Commission and Information Science [2003] and the

National Forum on Information Literacy, with the support of UNESCO, representing twenty-three countries from all seven continents). Among its tenets was the call for governments to develop strong interdisciplinary programs to create an informed citizenry, civil society, and competitive workforce. It also highlighted information literacy as a concern for all sectors of society, and even a basic human right of lifelong learning. It emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving usually at secondary and higher education levels (school and university libraries).

Information literacy is not a new concept in the United States. The American Library Association (ALA) was founded in 1876 in Philadelphia to help librarians do their job more efficiently and its mission evolved to include ensuring access to information for all. The ALA defines information literacy as "the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information (Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, 1989). In 2006 the National Forum on Information Literacy convened representatives from education, business, and government to address the information literacy deficit, yielding national standards for information and communications technology (ICT) literacy in the United States. The field of ICT is concerned with information technology (not necessarily educational technology or instructional technology) and a main priority is closing the digital divide that exists worldwide in the inequitable access to information (Fong, 2009; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2006).

Access to information is one part of media literacy in the United States, defined as the ability to "access, evaluate, produce and communicate using a variety of media forms" (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993). Hobbs (1998b) characterizes media literacy education in the United States as the intersection of media studies and education, borrowing heavily from already established models of British, Australian, and Canadian educators (Alvarado & Boyd-Barrett, 1992). Students need tools, skills, and understanding to use information effectively, and to successfully participate in the digital age (Hobbs, 2010). This entails two kinds of skills sets: digital *and* media literacy. Digital literacy entails working with the information and communication technologies in a networked environment, as well as understanding the social, cultural, and ethical issues that go along with the use of these technologies.

The emergence of media literacy education as a discipline over the past decade has seen an expansion in the traditional definition of media literacy to focus on understanding how students learn to think critically. Media literacy empowers teachers and students to be critical thinkers (Considine, 2009; Rodesiler, 2010) and creative producers of an increasingly wide range of messages using image, language, and sound. It is the skillful application of literacy skills to technologically mediated messages. Information literacy and media literacy have inquiry in common—asking critical

questions. Media literacy education requires media production under the assumption that one cannot truly become a critical consumer of information without having experience with the technology and constructing media texts (Hobbs, 1998b). Critics of the production component of media literacy argue that media production is most likely to be taught "as a decontextualized set of tasks that teach students a narrow set of skills, skills that merely reproduce the hierarchy of Hollywood or the news industry . . . a bogus type of vocational education" (p. 21).

Ultimately, information and media literacies are members of the same family rather than competitors. Renee Hobbs (2010) writes:

> We can consider different types of literacy to be part of the same family. For example, information literacy has typically been associated with research skills. Media literacy typically has been associated with critical analysis of news, advertising and mass media entertainment. Health media literacy has been associated with exploring media's impact on making positive choices related to nutrition, exercise, body image, violence and substance abuse prevention. Digital literacy is associated with the ability to use computers, social media, and the Internet. (p. 17)

Rather than compete, information literacy and media literacy can coexist. However, the reality is that they are competing for a narrowing curriculum. The importance of specifically naming *media literacy* in federal policy for the purposes of sanctioning funding allocation cannot be understated. For example, the 21st Century Skills Incentive Fund Act (S. 1029) proposed financial incentives ($100 million annual allocation) to the ten states that developed a comprehensive plan for implementing media literacy into their curricula. There is also a growing body of research that supports the academic efficacy of media literacy education. Goodman (2003) found that media literacy education reduces absenteeism among at risk students in urban schools. The growth of media literacy education in schools hinges upon costly professional development efforts among P-12 teachers and library media specialists. Nearly all fifty U.S. states have language in their curriculum frameworks that supports media literacy, although media literacy is not necessarily specifically mentioned (Hobbs, 2005). Even at the post-secondary level, media literacy education in the United States lacks a common understanding and foundation for what, where, how, and among whom it is taught (Mihailidis, 2008; Silverblatt et al., 2002). If the field of media literacy education is to enact the vision for building media literate, technologically proficient educational communities that are governed by democratic practices, more field-based research is needed on the efficacy of media literacy education in schools, libraries, and out of school programs.

Technological Literacy: Friend or Foe?

While the role of the federal government in education is limited and left up to individual states, the bureaucratic push for technology in education remains constant. The No Child Left Behind Act was federally enacted in 2001 to systematically close the achievement gap by requiring every identified racial and ethnic group to perform on grade level (make adequate yearly progress as measured by annual testing). By 2014, all students must achieve proficiency in reading, math, science, and technology. To this end, the industry-heavy and widely popular national organization Partnership for 21st Century Skills (http://www.p21.org) emphasizes the use of tools to collaborate and solve problems so that students can compete in the global economy. While an economic imperative is understandable given the capitalistic free-market economy of the United States, what constitutes best practices for effective teaching and learning in the twenty-first century is contested terrain. Students are also required to participate in the Nation's Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress). Beginning in 2012 technological literacy will be assessed separately as part of the Nation's Report Card. In sum, within the next four years, students will be tested for technological literacy on both state and federal levels.

Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), "technological literacy" is defined as the ability of young people to "exploit new technologies" and "enter the workforce and be competitive economically." Technology can refer to a discipline of study (technology education) as well as a set of skills to be acquired (vocational education). Technology can only be subordinate to curriculum (technology integration) as in the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) revised in 2007 by the International Society for Technology in Education. The NETS are fairly comprehensive with regards to meeting the demands of education in a democracy. The NETS core areas include: creativity and innovation; research and information fluency; critical thinking and problem solving and decision making; digital citizenship; and technology operations and concepts. As of 2009, forty-four states have either stand-alone technology standards for students or technology standards that are integrated into other student academic standards, and 56 percent of school districts meet the state definition of effective integration of technology (USDOE, 2009). While technology standards have been articulated, sanctioned, and adapted at national and local levels, it remains to be seen if standardized testing can adequately measure and report the democratic uses of technology in education, particularly in the use of technology to critically think and solve problems.

The 2010 National Educational Technology Plan, "Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology," calls for the application of advanced technologies to our daily personal and professional lives—both inside and outside of schools—in the areas of learning, assessment, teaching, infrastructure, and productivity. The plan outlines:

> Our education system relies on core sets of standards-based concepts and competencies that form the basis of what all students should know and should be able to do. Whether the domain is English language arts, mathematics, sciences, social studies, history, art, or music, states should continue to consider the integration of 21st-century competencies and expertise, such as critical thinking, complex problem solving, collaboration, multimedia communication, and technological competencies demonstrated by professionals in various disciplines.

The U.S. National Educational Technology Plan also recognizes the increasingly personalized uses of technological devices; it ultimately focuses on increasing educational "productivity" through the widespread use of technology. This industrial focus is inherent to (and expected from) national policy efforts. These policies, including No Child Left Behind, ultimately promote technology-driven educational reform, in contrast to educationally driven uses of technology. Preparing young people to enter the workforce and compete economically runs counter to democratic education, particularly when corporations and technology industries are the major stakeholders and loudest voices in formulating national educational policy.

In 2002 leaders in business, education, and policymaking assembled the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) as a leading advocacy organization with the goal of "infusing 21st century skills into education" (Framework for 21st Century Learning, 2004). The P21 organization is self-titled as a partnership, yet more of its members are from the technology industry than from education. The P21 vision is one of leveraging technology to support academic achievement and career skills. However, it holistically outlines familiar student outcomes such as creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration—and media literacy. The P21 framework is unique in its alignment of NETS, NCLB technology literacy standards, and the inclusion of media literacy.

Research indicates young people use digital technologies mainly through participation in *informal* settings rather than in school (Livingstone, 2002). Young people use computers primarily for entertainment—downloading music, watching videos, playing games, and socially networking (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Easy-to-use and relatively inexpensive digital video (via cameras, computers, cell phones, and smart phones) and editing software have proliferated and are widely available to young people. More than half of all students are considered digital content creators (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). In fact, full participation in modern society requires more than consuming information, but also *creating and sharing information* (Hobbs, 2010). Humans learn through their own interactions with one another as well as with media and technology "texts." They use media and technology to construct knowledge about themselves and the world around them (Denzin, 1992). The learning process is therefore complex, transactional, and highly social.

The context for technology literacy continues to widen. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently approved changes to E-Rate funding, allowing schools to have the option of using federal funding to extend Internet access to their communities *beyond school hours.* This is significant in that it accommodates the increasing use of mobile devices outside the classroom. It acknowledges the potential ubiquity of learning through and about technology beyond the classroom, but it also supports ubiquitous consumption and uses of technology without direct support for a sustained and rigorous pedagogy that cultivates critical inquiry of the political, social, and economic uses and impact of the technologies themselves.

While national and state standards are important to acknowledge, they alone are insufficient in preparing students to participate as critical and creative users of information (Leonard & Stewart, 2009). While P12 schools cope with the chronic top-down push to achieve technological proficiency by the eighth grade, there simultaneously exists a bottom-up need to address specific challenges among young people, including: (1) unequal access to a participatory culture (for which technological proficiency is prerequisite); (2) lack of transparency in the ways media shape young people's perception of the world; and (3) the ethical challenges of preparing young people for their increasingly public roles as media producers (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robinson, & Weigel, 2006; Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Media literacy education reconciles the clash between the standardized bureaucracy of technology education and the democratic implications of empowering youth as participatory citizens through their active and public uses of technology.

By definition, the technological literacy sanctioned by U.S. educational policy excludes devices that occupy a more prominent role in people's lives outside of formalized schooling. For example, educational policy is not concerned with the fact that more than 80 percent of Americans own a cell phone and in 2009 one-third of U.S. residents used a cell phone or smart phone to access the Internet for e-mailing, instant messaging, or information seeking (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2006). In contrast, media literacy is concerned with all technologized communication that occurs beyond schooling. It is inclusive of all media forms. In this sense, media literacy is both creative and critical in its stance toward technology; a media literate person can command the technological tools while also understanding their impact on information and the larger global society of which they are a part.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY

Nearly two decades ago, Kathleen Tyner (1992) incisively used the parable of the blind men and the elephant to describe the diversity of perspectives of those comprising the field of media literacy education—from media

producers, public broadcasters, activists, K-12 teachers, health profession-als, psychologists, and artists. Today the elephant remains in the room as multiple stakeholders rally around the need for media literacy. Hannah (2009) points out that health officials are interested in media literacy as it relates to food advertising, whereas psychologists are interested in raising public awareness of the effects of media, whereas English teachers are in-terested in media and popular culture as an extension of literature, and so on. The increased diversification of interests of media literacy across disci-plines in the United States spawned the need for a national organization.

From Partnership to Alliance
In 1997 four leaders in the media education movement (representing education, nonprofit and public health sectors) formed the Partnership for Media Education (PME) as a public/private collaboration to stimulate professional development in the field of media literacy (National Associa-tion for Media Literacy Education, n.d.). The first national media edu-cation conference was held in 1998 where "educators and practitioners could come together to learn the principles of media education in a venue that both exemplified and modeled the best practices in the field – in essence, a national forum for diverse views, visions and voices" (§2). At the 1998 conference, the board of directors was expanded and PME was formally incorporated, adopting governing by-laws and receiving tax ex-empt (501c3) status. At the 1999 conference, the PME Board of Directors doubled in size and continued its diversification in the health and com-munity-based organizations committed to media literacy. That same year, PME adopted a mission statement, elected officers, assigned committee chairs, and expressed a commitment to becoming a national membership association along with a name change to the Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA). The first AMLA conference was held in 2001 in Texas with ten caucuses formed around special interests. By the end of 2001, AMLA had three hundred founding members.

Diversity of disciplines combined with tense philosophical differences as to the nature and effects of media threatened the unity of the AMLA membership. In response to AMLA receiving funding from media compa-nies, members separated to form Action Coalition for Media Education. Yet there remained the single unifying principle "that media education was unanimously believed to be a necessary and common practice to en-sure young people had the basic tools to understand the impact of media" (National Association for Media Literacy Education, n.d., §11). Board members and other media literacy leaders met in Queens, New York, to draft the *Core Principles of Media Literacy Education* (*CPMLE*), a document that defined media literacy education and provided a framework for its implementation in the United States. The *CPMLE* and the *Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Messages* are now widely cited among research-

ers, practitioners, and advocacy groups (National Association for Media Literacy Education, 2006).

From Alliance to Educational Association
The positive reception of the *CPMLE* and the increased emphasis on education and the pedagogy of media literacy led to another organizational name change from the Alliance for a Media Literacy America to the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE). The 2010 NAMLE vision is "to help individuals of all ages develop the habits of inquiry and skills of expression that they need to be critical thinkers, effective communicators and active citizens in today's world." The inclusivity of media literacy as "habits of inquiry" and "skills of expression" also extend to a wider definition of educational settings:

> We define both education and media broadly. Education includes both formal and informal settings, classrooms and living rooms, in school and after school, anywhere that lifelong learners can be reached. Media include digital media, computers, video games, radio, television, mobile media, print, and communication technologies that we haven't even dreamed of yet. ("Vision and mission," n.d.)

The field of media literacy education is broad in scope and includes families, community organizations, schools, religious organizations, libraries, universities, government agencies, and media professionals. NAMLE board members consult with a national advisory council consisting of nine members, which represent thinkers and leaders in the field of education, public health, communications, media, and nonprofit organizations.

Toward a MLE Professional Learning Community
Breadth of vision and representation is one of NAMLE's greatest assets and also one of its greatest organizational challenges. The success of NAMLE in meeting the professional development needs of a broad constituency lies in harnessing the momentum of media literacy research and practice into professional development that is focused on the felt needs of NAMLE members and the local communities that they represent. This requires a bottom-up or more representational (democratic) approach to communications—a shift from the more traditional and centralized (broadcast) model of information dissemination. What this means for NAMLE as a membership association is to model both the critical and creative uses of technologies such as social networks, to magnify media literacy education efforts. In a field with its origins in broadcast media, the shift to networking technologies and a more decentralized approach to communication is a significant leap. AMLA took a step in that direction with the 2007 conference theme, "iPods, Blogs and Beyond: Evolving Media Literacy for the 21st Century," which focused on bridging media literacies and technological literacy. AMLA took another step with the 2009 conference theme, "Bridging Literacies: Critical Connections in a Digital World." The emphasis

continues to grow with NAMLE toward media production in the lives of young people (Modern Media Makers) and pedagogy (rather than the classroom) as the epicenter for media literacy education.

To magnify a more democratic approach to MLE practice and policy, NAMLE recently implemented a communications model that is more decentralized and networked. To this end, NAMLE, in 2010, launched a revamped and more dynamic website where multiple authors contribute information on current MLE news, research, teaching resources, job opportunities, member profiles, and best practices in MLE. Dynamic content is posted (and archived) through namle.net while a monthly *Update* e-newsletter directs traffic to namle.net. In this way, the NAMLE website serves as a common meeting place where content is dynamic. The NAMLE Communications Committee also established a Twitter feed, lending another stream to the flow of information for members. A Marketplace (in partnership with Amazon) was established as a communal space where NAMLE members can publicly list, evaluate, and even sell their work.

To bridge disciplines and time between NAMLE's biennial conferences, NAMLE held research summits to accompany the 2007 and 2009 conferences as opportunities to increase the rigor of MLE research and to identify common research trajectories across disciplines. In 2009 NAMLE launched the first issue of the open access *Journal of Media Literacy Education* to encourage discussion and growth in the field. The journal is produced three times per year and features scholarly articles from an interdisciplinary body of scholars as well as practitioners' articles and materials reviews.

With the limited attention of members, the ideal is for NAMLE as a membership association to be a significant part of the MLE information stream. Social scientist danah boyd (2010) refers to this strategic use of social media as "being attentively aligned with information" (p. 28). The challenge is to continuously meet the MLE interests and professional needs of NAMLE members (whether health professional, classroom teacher, or documentary filmmaker) while maintaining the push-pull flow of information. NAMLE also serves as a mouthpiece for its organizational and individual members by sharing their research and best practices with other leads in education, technology, government, and media. NAMLE's increased use of social networking technologies for professional development efforts is significant, as it models a democratic (bottom-up) approach through member-generated content that directly contrasts the highly bureaucratic (top-down) mechanism of federally mandated policy.

Harnessing Momentum

The NAMLE 2011 conference marks the second decade of NAMLE and signals its coming of age as a professional networking organization for media literacy educators and a growing source for research and best pedagogical practice. The NAMLE 2011 conference theme is "Global Visions/

Local Connections: Voices in Media Literacy Education." Media literacy education continues its evolution of inclusion as members will convene both online and in person for the professional conference in Philadelphia—the birthplace of democracy. The vision of a professional learning community and knowledge networking will be realized as conference attendees participate on both online and face-to-face formats. A Modern Media Makers global video contest privileges the voices of youth media producers, as contestants are invited to upload their three-minute videos that best exemplify the Core Principles of Media Literacy Education.

To continue the growth of NAMLE and media literacy education in the United States requires a paradigmatic shift in how institutions and organizations enact social and political change. In 2009 the NAMLE Board of Directors established and voted on the following goals in the continued effort to provide national leadership in the field of media literacy education:

- Operate as a media literacy education resource gateway for internal members and external stakeholders.
- Educate media, education, and government leaders and policy makers about the field of media literacy education.
- Enhance communication to membership to broaden knowledge and understanding of media literacy education.
- Identify and promote leading edge and effective practices and/or research in media literacy education.
- Use the *Core Principles of Media Literacy Education* to work with educators and education institutions to encourage standards adoption in media literacy education.
- Improve organizational infrastructure.

These strategic goals are particularly challenging for NAMLE as an organization with no full-time staff and a dearth of financial resources. The elected members comprising the board of directors are scattered throughout the United States and work through an active committee structure on an entirely volunteer basis to conduct the business of the organization and plan its future.

CONCLUSION

The current federal mandates and policies surrounding technological literacy are insufficient in addressing the information and media literacy needs of the United States. While educational policy, research, and practice in the United States should ultimately represent and address the perspective of the audiences they serve, the reality is that federal initiatives focus on an economic imperative of technological literacy, promoting pedagogies of deliverance that is neither humanistic nor socially change-

oriented. In contrast, NAMLE provides the organizational infrastructure for multiple stakeholders to converge and strengthen a burgeoning and underfunded field of study. The *Core Principles of Media Literacy Education* and the *Key Concepts* are significant steps toward moving media literacy education from the political margins and into the forefront of discussions about educational policies and teaching practices in the United States and into the mainstream consciousness of all practitioners. Whether a health professional, parent, school teacher, documentary film maker, clergy, or community activist the challenge remains the same—to cultivate the critical habits of mind that will shape the social and political democracies in which we live. While formalized schooling may continue to be the most systematic mechanism for widespread media literacy education, through NAMLE's broad outreach and coalescence of educational entities media literacy education can be simultaneously realized on more localized and global fronts. A critical shift must be made toward cultivating a global vision of information literacy while exercising localized efforts in media literacy, so that people of all ages have the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, produce, and communicate across a variety of media forms.

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