

# **Global/Local: Media Literacy for the Global Village**

**By**

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## **Global/Local: Media Literacy for the Global Village**

H. Marshall McLuhan believed that the “linking of electronic information would create an interconnected global village” by collapsing communication space and time barriers thus enabling people to interact and live on a global scale (Barnes, 2001; McLuhan, 1962; McLuhan & Powers, 1989). Today the global village acts as a metaphor for the complex interconnected electronic world that McLuhan predicted would emerge and provides a framework for helping us analyze our relationship with the media today and most importantly prepare for the future (Gozzi, 1996; McLuhan & Powers, 1989).

The globalization of the media, characterized by the internationalization of television programming, worldwide internet access, and cell phone technology, has indeed connected the world in an unprecedented manner. Because the media have often been identified as a “superpeer” replacing traditional socializing agents (Strasburger & Kaszdin, 1995) attention must be given to the ramifications, both positive and negative, of a hyper-mediated world on youth today. This paper addresses the evolution of the global village and its profound impact on youth (worldwide) through a discussion of how global and local interests intersect in a media-saturated environment. We offer media literacy education as a means through which young global citizens can navigate this “global village” in order to become fully engaged – yet autonomous -- members of both their local and global communities.

### **The Global Village: Media Use Today**

McLuhan might be amused, vindicated, or reified knowing that the global village is open 24/7. Youth currently spend an average of 6.5 -8 hours per day interacting with a wide range of media including television, magazines, videos games, books, radio, the Internet, and cell phones (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005; Livingstone & Bovill, 2001; Lenhart et al., 2007). In fact, younger generations are often described as “screenagers” instead of “teenagers” because they are always looking at or interacting with some type of screen often simultaneously (Rushkoff, 2006). For example, in a typical week, at least 81% of teens report that they will engage in some form of media multi-tasking, using more than one form of media at one time such as working on the computer and listening to music or talking on the telephone (Foehr, 2006). A number of recent reports provide additional supportive data regarding this pervasive media use.

While television remains the most often used media, 3 plus hours per day, of Generation M (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005), other media are prevalent when the television is off. (Note: the lowest rates of multi-tasking occur during television viewing). Of these, digital media are playing an increasingly predominant role:

- 93% of teens have been online (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005)
- 63 % of teens have a cell phone (Lenhart, et al., 2007)
- 62% of Millennials (12-14) are using their cell phones for entertainment (Deloitte & Touche, 2007)
- Social Media (teens) (Lenhart, et al., 2007)

- 55% belong to a social networking site and have posted profiles on sites like My Space and Facebook
- 59% of all teens or 64% of teens who are online report a wide range of content creating activities
- 35 % of all online teen girls and 20% of online teen boy have a blog
- 57% of teens watch “You Tube Videos”
- Teens also actively engage in downloading media: (“Kids age 12 to 14”, January, 2008)
  - Video: 7.1 times per month
  - Music videos: 5.7 times per month
  - Music: 4.2 times per month
  - Games: 3.1 times per month
  - Ring tones/ring tunes:2.8 times per month

Jenkins (2006) writes that the development of social media has also contributed to the development of a “participatory culture” that extends beyond the posting or downloading of media. For example, teens reported not only posting media but then also discuss what they have posted – almost a meta-communication; 47% of online teens have posted photos where others can see them, and 89% of those teens who post photos say that people comment on the images at least “some of the time” (Lenhart et al., 2007). In summary, youth are interacting with some form of media almost constantly. Smaller screens, such as cell phone and MP3 players, continue to grow in popularity as do social media, such as social networking sites and content creation activities.

It is important to contextualize *how* this media use occurs in the global village – a 24/7 multi-media global world. Prior to the emergence of this global village, the local village provided an environment in which everyone knew everyone else over a period of time and under many circumstances. Parents and other known adults provided a daily filter through which youth learned about differing values, lifestyles and points of view. Today through the media, local is now global. The village has become so large that filters are no longer provided through human interaction, but through technology itself, with V-Chips, parental controls and other software solutions. But these digital filters are still not capable of delivering the discernment that human judgment renders, and the sheer volume of media interaction in the global village precludes much discussion with children about individual messages. Yet parents, educators and concerned adults continue to see the need for providing a way to help the young interpret the messages they receive and to understand their responsibility in producing messages through which they interact with the global village. And all the while, through this global interconnectedness, the global becomes local and the local becomes global.

### **The Global Village: Where Global is Local and Local is Global**

Globalization is a phenomenon involving the integration of economies, cultures, governmental policies, and political movements around the world. The concept of globalization, as applied to the media, has resulted in McLuhan’s prediction of a connected global village. However, today’s village is not one in which all members are homogeneously connected but rather it is a complicated and interdependent environment

that has enormous political, social, and economic ramifications worldwide (Hobbs, 2007; Kraidy, 1992; McChesney, 2001; Moran 2006).

The global media environment allows audiences to share “the same television programs, desire the same products, and even see each others’ lives portrayed through the media while living apart geographically” (Moran, 2006, p. 288). Commercial global media conglomerates provide common access to television programming, music, film, and websites (McChesney, 2001). It has been said that youth from different countries may have more in common with each other than they do with their own families because of these common media platforms. Indeed, it was believed the exportation of primarily U.S. programming would lead to cultural imperialism and result in cultural dominance, a homogenous audience, and a loss of local cultural values (Schiller, 1993; McChesney, 2001). However, rather than a “direct effects” model, a more complex and interdependent view of global media has emerged – it is one that examines the global media through a framework of “hybridity” or “glocalization” (Kraidy, 1992; Kraidy, 1996; McChesney, 2001).

Glocalization has been defined as “the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in geographic areas” (Ritzer, 2003); “a process whereby global corporations tailor products and marketing to particular local circumstances to meet variations in consumer demand (Maynard, 2003, p. 6); or a means to “analyze the ways in which social actors construct meanings, identities and institutional forms within the sociological context of globalization” (Guilanotti and Robertson, 2006).

In the context of global media, glocalization offers a lens through which we can understand how “audience members negotiate meaning (of mediated texts) through their own specific cultural lens that is absolutely influenced by both local and global forces” (Moran, p. 288). Kraidy (1992) writes that such interpretations recognize the relationship of both the “homogenizing effect of global media as well as the role of local interpretation in the communication processes” (p. 469). These intersections are particularly critical in the context of media directed to youth as media has been identified as a primary socializing agent and influence on identity formation. Media convey values, lifestyles and points of view which may or may not be consonant with local values, lifestyles or points of view, and censorship and technology filters cannot provide the input needed to help youth and adults alike to determine which messages to value and circulate. Education and empowerment for audiences are now being seen as more important than ever to gain understanding and agency. Thus, the emergence and relevance of an educational approach -- media literacy -- is now underpinned by a global media environment that blends global and local perspectives.

Glocalization (the intersection of global and local) of media has conceptualized in a number of ways; in this essay we will focus on the following: (1) how local culture influences the interpretation of global media; (2) how global programming has been adapted to fit local cultures; and (3) how the local can become global

**Local Interprets Global:** First, glocalization can be thought of as how local cultures influence the interpretation of global media. The exportation of successful American programming to youth and adults dominates the global mediascape across cable and satellite television channels and in movie theaters. For example, Viacom’s “Nickelodeon channel has expanded to 100 countries worldwide and provides global internet access to nick.com, nickjr.com, nick-at-night.com and tvland.com” (Moran,

2006, p. 289). In a similar case, Disney has now has over 20 international sites in Asia, Latin America, and Europe. In most cases, exported programs do not really contain culturally “diverse messages but rather are often only dubbed in the local language offering the same stories, product tie-ins and ideologies to a global audience” (Moran, 2006). Thus, local cultures are left to determine the meanings of this imported media.

Current research suggests that perhaps local cultures interpret these media texts in the light of their own cultural values and norms rather than completely adopting the exported messages. For example, a case study in the Philippines concluded that a wildly popular imported telenovela (soap opera) does not change or alter social views but rather reinforces commonly-held Philippine class ideologies for viewers (Santos, 2006). Similarly, study in consumer research disputes the myth of a homogenous global youth culture and define the youth market as one that interprets and reworks global cultural practices and meaning to fit into their local contexts” (Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). Thus the location of consumption of the global culture influenced identity formation; for example, in Denmark, identity construction was articulated more at the individual level while in Greenland it was articulated at the collective level. Kjeldgaard and Askegaard note:

“in the Danish context, this manifests itself in handling the multitude of cultural opportunities handed down by the parent culture; in the Greenland context, it means negotiating a positive identity away from the deprivation and postcolonial celebration of ethnicity, which were the projects of the parent culture there” (p. 245).

In this case, the global youth culture was found to be mediated by the environment in which the youth found themselves.

**Global Produces Local.** The second conceptualization of the global/local relationship is one in which global programs actually localize their content to ensure cultural appropriateness. For example, *Sesame Street*, a global product, enters into local partnerships to co-produce programming that is culturally significant (see Moran, 2006 for a detailed description of this process). Such collaborations provide audiences with an “alternative to mass-produced entertainment fare” (p. 299). While such collaborations are rare, they do provide a model for the true integration of both local and global.

In programming that is more representative perhaps of hybridity, MTV Arabia and MTV China are producing programs that adapt the MTV format to local cultures. Using both imported media and local artists, the MTV programs represent how a primarily western media format is adapting to cultural and political norms in local programming (Fung, 2006; Chudy, 2007). Fung (2006) writes that in China, “MTV maximizes its ability to maneuver within the local culture” with an emphasis on Western music frameworks. On MTV Arabia, in addition to imported media, Partick Samaha the general manager of MTV Arabia stated that “we've created programs that are an Arabic version of MTV programs ...it is the first time that programs like this will really reflect the youth culture here, but we've been mindful all the way about respecting the local culture.”

**Local Becomes Global.** Third, the mechanisms are in place where now the local can become global. For example, “global media corporations such a Sony have been producing films with local companies in China, France, and India” thus offering these countries global distribution mechanisms. In the same manner, global distribution and

production partnerships are also being established in countries where devotion to local music is passionate, such as Brazil (McChesney, 2001). And such distribution networks have created a stream of exports from around the globe to American markets including the films of Bollywood and the burgeoning Asian film industry as well as the popular Japanese Anime' to name a few.

The current research on the impact of the Internet suggests another mediated location where the local becomes global and the global becomes local. Jenkins (2006) points out that the new media has been identified as the harbinger of digital democracy and embraces the emergence of online communities that reflect "changes that cut across culture and commerce, technology and social organization." In one study of the Chinese web sites of the 100 top global brands, Maynard and Tian (2004) identified a glocal strategy was being employed in cyberspace. In this case, 58 of the 100 top brands offered a Chinese website that displayed high attention to localization positioning the brand as local but with a global reach.

The interweaving of global and local can be viewed as one in which we must pay attention to both the source of the media and to the audience, and the interaction between the two, affecting both. One reason why this is important is because of the obsequious nature of the media today. This pervasiveness of the media has a certain set of implications, as we discuss in the next section.

### **Influence of the Media in Identity Formation**

Our identity is strongly influenced by the media (Buckingham, 2008); today youth are redefining their identity via media globalization; at times we identify with what is global and other times we take what is global and make it local This is of particular concern as we know that media is instrumental in identity construction by youth.

Identified as a superpeer (Strasburger & Kaszdin, 1995), the media have now joined, and in some cases replaced parents, families, peers, schools, and religious organizations as a primary socializing agent in American society (Gerbner, et al., 1990). Children's exposure to mediated messages can result in both health benefits and risks across a wide range of behaviors including nutritional habits (Crooks, 2000; Neumark-Sztainer, et al. 1999), violence (Paik & Comstock, 1994) , sexual activity (Signorelli, 1993), and tobacco use (Pierce et al., 1998; Schooler et al., 1996). And media provides a world where youth who live next door to each other often prefer to communicate through Facebook rather than face-to-face. Everyone and everything are accessible yet distant and once-removed.

In this glocalized world, media are the parents and teachers, unfettered by local custom or local control, and influenced by values, lifestyles and points of view from throughout the globe. Rather than learning to navigate their relationship with only their local village and its customs, children must learn to navigate their relationship with this global village from an early age: an imperative which can't be denied.

Yet children are still children. They continue to need guidance and they continue to need to learn the skills to become critically autonomous and now, to be capable of navigating these global waters. In this global village, where media is often called "the other parent," children need to be taught an age-old process in a new way. They need to learn in a conscious and systematic way what was once a "given" in a face-to-face world: a set of skills for questioning their experiences, and a quick process for becoming more discerning and more independent in making their own decisions about who and what

they interact with, in accordance with their own values. Where parents and teachers aren't present – in the media world – children must acquire and use an internalized process through which they can parent themselves and through which they can negotiate their relationship with media on a lifelong basis.

We offer media literacy as this discernment process which becomes internalized and provides a means for youth to move more safely and confidently through the global village.

### **Media Literacy for the Global Village**

Like all great movements, media literacy began at the grassroots as parents, educators and concerned citizens began to see that if media was to play a pivotal role as children's teacher, that children would still need to have a way of filtering through the messages so that wise choices, in accordance with acceptable community norms, are possible. Formal education, not just censorship or control, was seen as an avenue through which to help young people understand their choices and to help question the values represented through the media.

Media literacy has its roots in the 1960's through the 1980's through the work of pioneers like McLuhan, Sister Bede Sullivan and Fr. John Culkin, among others. Barry Duncan, an early media literacy advocate from Canada, reports that early conferences in Canada, beginning in 1990 at the University of Wales, Ontario, started attracting a second wave of people interesting in addressing concerns about media. Today, the field has continued to grow to the point where it is represented in as global a way as the media itself. Gradually, perceptions about what media literacy is – and what it isn't – have emerged as meeting the demand for educating citizens capable of navigating the global village has increased. Understanding that demand is a starting place for understanding media literacy.

In today's global society, citizens need the skills to access, analyze, evaluate, create and interact with media information 24/7. The goal is not so much to be able to store information, but to *process* information efficiently and effectively, so that we understand and are able to conduct our lifelong relationship with media by being:

- *Efficient information managers.* We need to access information quickly and be able to store information effectively so that we can access it again.
- *Wise consumers.* We need to understand the messages that come our way and make wise individual decisions, using the information We have.
- *Responsible producers.* Today, everyone can be a producer, and in producing, it is important for all of us to consider the audience and the society we live in, to provide an enlightened approach to media production.
- *Active participants.* In using media, in deciding to buy products or to cast or ballot, we are sending messages and voting and participating in society. We not only buy a product or a service, but we buy an organization's advertising and communications, and we buy the worldview that the organization's communication represents. Our votes count, and so does our own expression.

Where would a company or a university or a nonprofit or an entertainer or an executive or a politician be without us, the audience?

This vision illustrates what a “media literate” citizen might be like. But though this vision is admirable and universal, it is not enough. There must be a pathway to creating such media literate citizens, and that pathway must be clear and paved. In the past 30 years, the field of media literacy education has emerged to organize and promote the importance of teaching this expanded notion of what an educated citizen is.

At first, media literacy was seen as teaching children about media – how advertising works or how to analyze the nightly news telecast. But in her landmark book *“Literacy in a Digital World: Teaching and Learning in the Age of Information,”* Kathleen Tyner (1998) posited that media education is more about education than it is about media. For Tyner, media education “expands literacy to include reading and writing through the use of new and merging communication tools. It is learning that demands the critical, independent and creative use of information” (p. 196).

Today, the field has matured to a greater understanding of its potential, not just as a new kind of literacy but also as the engine for transforming the very nature of learning in a global multimedia environment (Thoman and Jolls, 2004). As noted by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2003), “Students will spend all their adult lives in a multi-tasking, multi-faceted, technology-driven, diverse, vibrant world – and they must arrive equipped to do so” (p. 4). Media literacy, grounded as it is in inquiry-based, process-oriented pedagogy, offers not a new subject to teach but rather a new way to teach and even more important, a new way to learn.

Learning happens anywhere and everywhere, 24/7. Increasingly it occurs most powerfully through the convergence of media and technology. Video games, for example, are not just mindless entertainment. According to literary scholar, James Paul Gee (2003), they are actually quite intricate learning experiences that have a great deal to teach us about how learning and literacy are changing the modern world. In *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, Gee identified 36 learning principles built into good games and predicted that video games are the forerunners of powerful instructional tools in the future.

It is this convergence between media and education, between entertainment and learning, that is driving major change in the sources and the content of what we learn and how we learn in today’s world. Media literacy is not needed in the future, it is needed now, urgently, to assure that our citizens are equipped to make the decisions and contributions a global economy and global culture demand of them.

A recent study by the American Diploma Project (2004), an organization composed of representatives from Achieve Inc., the Education Trust and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, echoes the need for closing the gap between the classroom and “real life.” Their research indicates that high school students are poorly prepared for college and the job market, and that employers and postsecondary institutions “all but ignore the diploma, knowing that it often serves as little more than a certificate of attendance” because “what it takes to earn one is disconnected from what it takes for graduates to compete successfully beyond high school” (American Diploma Project, 2004, p. 1).



The American Diploma Project (2004) called for rigorous national standards to better reflect the challenges faced by high school graduates. This is good news for advocates of media education. National standards in all countries would ensure that every child has access to this valuable instruction. Furthermore, it would lead to a consistent, measurable definition of media literacy and to a set of competencies to guide curriculum development.

Certainly the need for a common vocabulary and common understanding of what media literacy is, and how to deliver it, is useful in going forward and in avoiding censoring, boycotting or blaming the media. Instead, media literacy may be seen to advocate a philosophy of empowerment through education, calling for the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms, thereby enabling citizens world-wide to participate in life in a global media world

Although media literacy is ideally suited for an educational context, it is clearly not limited to children or to the K-12 classroom. Adults, too, need the opportunity to gain the skills they now find missing in their educational background. Health and religious communities as well as the business world can all make valuable contributions to educating adults.

Even the technology, entertainment and media industries have a valuable role to play. Media are powerful teachers. Their power can be a key component of a successful mandate to help all citizens become fluent in 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. As noted in the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2003) report, “As the world grows increasingly complex, success and prosperity will be linked to people’s ability to think, act, adapt and communicate creatively” (p. 10).

If media literacy is to emerge as a global force, with a standard vocabulary and common understanding, what are some characteristics of media literacy that provide this commonality?

First, media literacy helps individuals explore their deep and enduring relationship with media. In 1989, Eddie Dick, Media Education Officer for the Scottish Film Council, developed the Media Triangle, which illustrated the relationship between Text, Production and Audience. Understanding this relationship is fundamental to understanding the power dynamic between these three elements involved in media interactions.

In looking at a common brand identity or logo, for example, it becomes evident that we as an audience have a shared understanding of the text – the logo – that was produced by a particular organization. We did not necessarily “ask” for this understanding, but because of repeated exposure to the brand, we have internalized or taken in an understanding of what the brand means and how we may have interacted with it in the past, perhaps through product purchases. The producer has established a relationship with us, the audience. This relationship was established through the text, which is the brand identity. Yet we as the audience exert the ultimate power over the relationship when we consciously decide to engage or not.

Second, the focus of media literacy is on process rather than content. The goal of media literacy is not to memorize facts about media or even be able to make a video or design a website. Rather, the goal is to explore questions that arise when one engages critically with a mediated message – print or digital. It involves posing problems that exercise higher order thinking skills – learning how to identify key concepts, make

connections between multiple ideas, ask pertinent questions, identify fallacies, and formulate a response. It is these skills, more than factual knowledge, that form the foundation of intellectual inquiry and workplace productivity, and that are necessary for exercising full citizenship in a democratic society and a global economy (Thoman and Jolls, 2004)

Such skills have always been essential for an educated life, and good teachers have always fostered them. But they too often emerge only as a by-product of mastering content areas such as literature, history, the sciences and mathematics. Learning and process skills are seldom taught explicitly. But if we are to graduate students who can be in charge of their own continual learning in a media culture, we must “incorporate learning skills into classrooms deliberately, strategically and broadly” (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2003, p. 4). As writer Alvin Toffler (as cited in Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2003) pointed out, “The illiterate of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn” (p. 4). By its very nature, media literacy education teaches and reinforces 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills.

Third, media literacy education expands the concept of text to include not just written texts but any message form – verbal, aural, or visual (or all three together!) – that are used to create and then pass ideas back and forth between human beings. Full understanding of such a text involves not just deconstruction activities – that is, taking apart a message that already exists – but also construction activities – learning to write their opinions and ideas with the wide range of multimedia tools now available to young people growing up in a digital world.

Fourth, media literacy is characterized by the principle of inquiry – that is, learning to ask important questions about whatever you see, watch or read:

- Is this new scientific study on diet and weight valid?
- What are the implications behind the idea of ranking my friends on a social networking site?
- What does it mean when the news reporter talks about a “photo-op?”

With a goal of promoting healthy skepticism rather than cynicism, the challenge for the teacher (or parent) is not to provide answers but to stimulate more questions – to guide, coach, prod and challenge the learner to discover how to go about finding an answer. “I don’t know: How could we find out?” is the media literacy mantra.

How could we find out? Is a question, of course, that opens up many more questions. And how we even approach the question determines what answers we might find. Inquiry is also a messy process because one question leads to another and yet another. To keep inquiry on course and to provide a way to be able to master a process of inquiry, curriculum specialists look for a comprehensive framework to provide guidance and overall direction. Core concepts of media literacy, rooted in media studies by academics from throughout the world, have evolved as a way to express understanding of common media characteristics. Various adaptations of core concepts have been developed, including eight core concepts used in Canada as a way of structuring curriculum.

The Center for Media Literacy (CML), one of the pioneering media literacy organizations in the United States (U.S.), provided a framework in 2002 through the release of its original CML MediaLit Kit™. Designed to provide a framework for

learning and teaching in a media age, the CML MediaLit Kit features Five Core Concepts for Media Literacy, and provided Five Key Questions for deconstruction of media messages. Recognizing that skills of critical analysis are just as important during media production, in 2007 CML also developed Five Key Questions for construction of media messages. This then completed the CML framework for analysis, called Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS) by addressing questions from the viewpoint of both consumers and producers.

Based on the work of media scholars and literacy educators in the U.S. and from around the world, each of the Five Key Questions flows from a corresponding Core Concept and provides an entry point to explore the five fundamental aspects of any message in any medium: authorship, format, audience, content and purpose. Starting with simple versions of the questions for young children and moving on to more sophisticated analyses for adults, students of all ages can learn how to apply the questions to a wide variety of messages. Because the questions are succinct, media literacy literature includes a wide variety of “guiding questions” to help to tease out the deepest understanding possible.

Learning to ask the Five Key Questions is like learning to ride a bike or to swim: it takes practice and usually is not mastered the first time out. Once learned, however, the process becomes automatic as users build the habit of routinely subjecting media messages to a battery of questions appropriate to their age and ability.

As the cornerstone of the media literacy process, the Center for Media Literacy’s Five Key Questions provide a shortcut and an on-ramp to acquiring and applying critical thinking skills in a practical, replicable, consistent and attainable way. They are an academically sound and yet an engaging way to begin and they provide curriculum developers with a useable structure.

Teachers are often called upon to teach critical thinking, but seldom given guidance on “how.” The CML framework, Questions/Tips (Q/TIPS) provides a point of entry and a quick process for continued skill development on a lifelong basis (see next page):

**CML's FIVE CORE CONCEPTS AND KEY QUESTIONS  
FOR CONSUMERS AND PRODUCERS  
Media Deconstruction/Construction Framework**

<b>CML's Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)</b>				
© 2002-2007 Center for Media Literacy, www.medialit.org				
<b>#</b>	<b>Key Words</b>	<b>Deconstruction: CML's 5 Key Questions (Consumer)</b>	<b>CML's 5 Core Concepts</b>	<b>Construction: CML's 5 Key Questions (Producer)</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Authorship</b>	Who created this message?	All media messages are constructed.	What am I <b>authoring</b> ?
<b>2</b>	<b>Format</b>	What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?	Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.	Does my message reflect understanding in <b>format</b> , creativity and technology?
<b>3</b>	<b>Audience</b>	How might different people understand this message differently?	Different people experience the same media message differently.	Is my message engaging and compelling for my target <b>audience</b> ?
<b>4</b>	<b>Content</b>	What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in or omitted from this message?	Media have embedded values and points of view.	Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my <b>content</b> ?
<b>5</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	Why is this message being sent?	Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.	Have I communicated my <b>purpose</b> effectively?

CML's Five Key Questions of Media Literacy apply to both deconstruction, or analysis and consumption of media messages, as well as construction, or production of media messages.

When we "consume" or analyze media messages, we have no control over the content of the message. Instead, we only control the meaning that we make from the message and how we might want to respond to that meaning in our thought processing or in making decisions or taking action. We can accept or reject it, but unless we "remix" and "rehash" the message, we cannot change it until we enter into an active production process.

But when we "produce" or construct media messages, we *do* control the content of the message to the extent that we have autonomy or self-awareness. Yet we always bring ourselves to the message, with all of our experiences and knowledge that inevitably affect the content of our messages, because by definition, human beings have imperfect understanding, and each human being is unique. In constructing a message, we have many more decisions to make. We are not just deciding how to make meaning from our own message, but through our construction techniques, we are also influencing how others might make meaning from it and possibly reacting to input from others. We have both personal and social power, and therefore personal and social responsibility toward our audience. Where there is communication, there is audience, even if it is an audience of one!

The Five Core Concepts apply in both the case of consumption and production of media; however, the Five Key Questions that stem from each of the Five Core Concepts are slightly altered because consumers have a different point of view from producers, and this point of view affects the "voice" of the questions, from the passive voice for consumers to the active voice of producers.

The process of analysis encouraged by the Five Key Questions and the Five Core Concepts informs the decision-making or actions that we may take. This decision-making/action process is represented through CML's Empowerment Spiral. The Empowerment Spiral starts with:

- awareness of an issue or message,
- analysis through the Five Key Questions,
- reflection through processing our learning, and
- action -- whether we decide to take action or not.

Media literacy is about understanding our relationship with media, about how we make meaning from a media product and about understanding the greater role of media in society. Though being media literate implies a broader skill set than simply evaluating a media product, evaluating a media product always involves the skills of media literacy. Each of the following of CML's Key Questions are explained from the standpoint of Deconstruction/Consumers (Thoman & Jolls, 2002) and of Construction/Producers (Jolls, 2007):

## **Deconstruction/Consumers**

### **CML's Key Question 1: Who Created This Message?**

This question addresses the Core Concept that “All media messages are constructed” and explores the issue of authorship. Whether we are watching the nightly news, passing a billboard on the street, or reading a political campaign flyer, the media message we experience was written by someone (or probably many people), images are captured and edited, and a creative team with many talents put it all together. However, as the audience, we do not get to see or hear the words, pictures or arrangements that are rejected. We see, hear or read only what was accepted! What is important for critical thinking is the recognition that whatever is “constructed” by just a few people can tend to become “the way it is” for the rest of us.

Helping people understand how media are put together – and what may have been left out – as well as how media shape what we know and understand about the world we live in is a critical first step in recognizing that media are not natural but constructed, just like a house is built or a car manufactured. Contrary to popular opinion, media are not windows on the world, nor are they even mirrors reflecting the real world. What they are, in truth, are carefully manufactured cultural products.

## **Construction/Producers**

### **CML's Key Question 1: What Am I Authoring?**

Again, this question addresses the Core Concept that “All media messages are constructed” and explores the issue of authorship. When we look at a building, for example, we see that a church looks differently than a house; an office building looks differently than a retail store. Whether someone tells us what type of building it is or not, we recognize the building for what it is due to the way that it's built or put together; the elements that make up the construction of the building cue us as to how the building is used. And someone, or a team of people, decided what those construction elements are going to be and then actually put the building together, piece by piece.

The same is true of media. When we decide to “manufacture” media, we as authors decide what type of building we will make and what construction elements to use so that the building's purpose is recognizable to others. Whether it's an advertisement or a logo, a billboard or a social networking page, a videogame or a novel, all media constructions exemplify certain characteristics that must be present for the construction to be recognized. Then, these elements are carefully put together to meet the author specifications, whatever they may be.

Authors, designers, developers and producers – however they are labeled -- all create their own media environments, just as builders create physical environments. When we enter or create a media world, we leave the real world behind.

## **Deconstruction/Consumers**

### **CML's Key Question 2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?**

Flowing from the Core Concept that “Media messages are constructed using creative language with its own rules,” this line of questions examines the creative components that are used in putting it together – the words, music, color, movement, camera angle and many more.

Most forms of communication – whether newspapers, television game shows or horror movies – depend on a kind of “creative language”: scary music heightens fear, camera close-ups convey intimacy, big headlines signal significance. Understanding the grammar, syntax and metaphor system of media, especially visual language, not only helps us to be less susceptible to manipulation but also increases our appreciation and enjoyment of media as constructed cultural artifacts.

The best way to understand how media are put together is to do just that – make a video, create a game or develop an advertising campaign. The more real-world the project is, the better. The four major arts disciplines – music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts – also can provide a context through which one gains skills of analysis, interpretation and appreciation along with opportunities to practice self-expression and creative production.

## **Construction/Producers**

### **CML's Key Question 2: Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity and technology?**

Again flowing from the Core Concept that “Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules,” this question explores McLuhan’s famous saying that “the media is the message.” Often, the media determine a great deal about the message. If we are using cellphones to communicate, our messages had better be short and compact! If we are producing film to communicate, we had better know how to make a film and how to use the language of film to communicate with our production team. And if we want a message to resonate with powerful emotions or with compelling facts, we must be clearly aware of what these are and we had better be the master of crafting a particular form of message, whether it’s entertaining, informing, persuading or participating.

Having a deep knowledge of the arts is also helpful in mastering the creative languages of media construction. Theatre requires knowledge of storytelling techniques; dance and motion demands understanding of choreography; music involves knowledge of tempo and instruments and orchestration; visual arts require knowledge of perspective and line and form and color.

And technology plays a role, too, because the technology provides the tools and also the environmental constraints in which the tools can be used in cases like videogames or websites or search engines. Before making or breaking the rules, we must first know and understand what the rules are.

### **Deconstruction/Consumers**

#### **CML's Key Question 3: How might different people understand this message differently?**

Flowing from the Core Concept that “Different people experience the same media message differently,” this question examines how who we are influences how we understand or respond to a media text.

Each audience member brings to each media text a unique set of life experiences (age, gender, education, cultural upbringing, etc.) that when applied to the text – or combined with the text – create unique interpretations.

We may not be conscious of it, but we are all (even toddlers) constantly trying to make sense of what we see, hear or read. The more questions we can ask about what we and others are experiencing around us, the more alert we can be when it comes to accepting or rejecting messages. And hearing other's interpretations can build respect for different cultures and appreciation for minority opinions, a critical skill in an increasingly multicultural world.

### **Construction/Producers**

#### **CML's Key Question 3: Is my message engaging and compelling for my target audience?**

Again flowing from the Core Concept that “Different people experience the same media message differently,” this question acknowledges that not all messages are designed for all audiences. Creative techniques alone are not enough to attract the attention of an audience, because each audience and indeed, each individual is different. The more we know about the audience we are appealing to, the better chance we have of engaging that audience, whether the audience is one person or many. And if the audience is engaged, the audience will feel compelled to take in our message and possibly even view or hear or interact with our entire message, from start to finish.

When we go to see a movie, we never “see” the same movie as our neighbor or friend. We can only see through our own eyes. Yet media appeals to life experiences that we have in common, or otherwise we would have no interest in the message. It is for this reason that advertisers “target” audiences, sometimes to reach the widest audience possible, and sometimes to reach only a select few. But in either case, knowledge of the audience and data about the audience helps provide understanding in reaching the audience efficiently and effectively, hopefully for mutual benefit. The producer affects the audience, while the audience affects the producer.

### **Deconstruction/Consumer**

#### **CML's Key Question 4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in – or omitted from – this message?**

This question explores the content of a media message and flows from the Core Concept that “Media have embedded values and points of view.”



Because all media messages are constructed, choices have to be made. These choices inevitably reflect the values, attitudes and points of view of the ones doing the constructing. The decision about a character's age, gender or race mixed in with the lifestyles, attitudes and behaviors that are portrayed, the selection of a setting (Urban? Rural? Affluent? Poor?), and the actions and reactions in the plot are just some of the ways that values become "embedded" in a television show, a movie or an advertisement. Even the news has embedded values in the decisions made about what stories go first, how long they are, what kinds of pictures are chosen and so forth.

What is significant about this question is not the fact that ideas and values are embedded but that value-laden information reinforces – or challenges – how we interpret the world around us and the people in it. If we have the skills to rationally identify both overt and latent values in a mediated presentation, whether from the media or from a coworker, we are likely to be much more tolerant of differences and more astute in our decision-making to accept or reject the overall message. Being able to recognize and name missing perspectives is a critical skill as we negotiate our way each day of our lives through an increasingly multicultural society.

### **Construction/Producers**

#### **CML's Key Question 4: Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?**

Again flowing from Core Concept that "Media have embedded values and points of view," this question asks producers to confront themselves. Because we are ourselves as individuals, we always bring ourselves – our values, our life experience and our points of view – to our messages. Yes, we can represent other voices and other viewpoints to the best of our ability, but there is never a way for us to represent all other voices; necessarily, someone or something is always left out. Because we are human, we can only aim to be fair and balanced, or admittedly biased in our viewpoints, but we can never be truly objective or provide perfect information.

Instead, when we present our message to our audience, we are selecting and framing the content that we are presenting according to our own priorities. Perhaps we consider the needs of the audience or perhaps not. The more clearly and consistently we frame and select our content, the more readily our audience can identify the lifestyles, values and points of view we are presenting, and determine whether that frame suits them or not.

### **Deconstruction/Consumers**

#### **CML's Key Question 5: Why is this message being sent?**

With Key Question 5, we look at the motive or purpose of a media message. Recognizing the fifth core concept that "Most media messages are constructed to gain profit and/or power," we use this line of questioning to determine whether and how a message may have been influenced by money, ego, influence or ideology. To respond to a message appropriately, we need to be able to figure out why it was sent.

Much of the world's mass media today were developed as moneymaking enterprises and continue to operate as commercial businesses. So when evaluating a specific media message, it helps to know if profit is the purpose. A commercial influence

over entertainment media may be more tolerable to many people than, say, a commercial influence over the news. But with democracy at stake almost everywhere around the world, citizens of every country need to be equipped with the ability to determine both economic and ideological spin.

The issue of message motivation has changed dramatically since the Internet became an international platform through which groups and organizations – even individuals – have ready access to powerful tools that can persuade others to a particular point of view. As an exercise in power unprecedented in human history, the Internet provides multiple reasons for users of all ages to be able to interpret rhetorical devices, spot faulty reasoning, verify sources and recognize the qualities of legitimate research.

### **Construction/Producers**

#### **CML's Key Question 5 Have I communicated my purpose effectively?**

Again based on the Core Concept that “Most media messages are constructed to gain profit and/or power,” Key Question 5 asks producers to evaluate the effectiveness of the communication in reaching their ends.

If we are going to send a message, we must have a reason or a purpose. Generally, there are three reasons: we want to persuade or influence or inform someone of something, and as a result, we have a power motive (defining power as neutral and in its broadest sense!). Or we want them to buy something that we are selling, and so we have a profit motive. Or perhaps we have a mix of both a profit and a power motive, where we want to sell the world on a new idea and a new product at the same time. These motives are not necessarily good nor bad, but purpose is always present, regardless of attempts to be fair or balanced.

Behind media messages there is always intent. Inherently, there is nothing wrong with profit or power; they can be honorable and serve the public good. Is our intent to make the world a better place? Does our message provide mutual benefit for individuals and for the social good, as well? These are among the questions we must ask of ourselves.

The CML MediaLit Kit was created to help make media literacy more accessible as a discipline through a convenient and credible “packaging” of the Core Concepts and Key Questions. In doing so, the hope was to establish a common vocabulary and labeling through which to build curriculum and training for media literacy as a building block for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. It provides, for the first time, an accessible integrated outline of the foundational concepts needed to organize and structure teaching activities across the curriculum, across cultures and across disciplines. Through systematic professional development and parental education, adults master both the Core Concepts and the Key Questions plus gain the conceptual know-how to organize media literacy learning in school and nonschool venues.

The vision of media literacy is to put all individuals ultimately in charge of their own learning, empowering them to take an active rather than a passive role in acquiring new knowledge and skills. In a sense, using this methodology provides risk management,

hopefully making wise choices possible. The Five Key Questions and Five Core Concepts serve as the “big ideas” or the “enduring understanding” that curriculum specialists look for to generate the thinking, organizing and communicating competencies called for by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and its allies. Together, they are a unique contribution to 21<sup>st</sup> century education and a powerful set of tools for preparing not only a flexible and proficient workforce but also informed citizens who understand, share in and contribute to the public debate.

The response to the publication of the CML MediaLit Kit has been world-wide, attesting to the global interest in media literacy and in tools that make media literacy accessible to all. The Center for Media Literacy has received inquiries from every corner of the globe, asking for permission to use the MediaLit Kit and sometimes, to translate the materials. An organization from Columbia, South America, translated CML’s book, *Literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, into Spanish. An organization from Sao Paulo, Brazil, translated it into Portuguese. The list goes on...and this is all testimony to the international nature of media literacy and to the fact that these concepts and questions are truly boundaryless.

In this glocalized world we live in, access to content and the accumulated knowledge of centuries is limitless and yet in its very vastness, ultimately the enormity of it all is inaccessible to the human mind. And so it is still the human mind and the human spirit that we have in common, and though we may no longer need to pass along a storehouse of knowledge to our children, we still need to pass along the spirit of the village and the notion that indeed, parents and other responsible adults raise each and every child. Media literacy is a way to insure that this spirit lives, and that we have a common way to process our vast knowledge and experience, a common way to understand and to extend ourselves and our relationships with each other and the glocalized media world.

As John Lennon famously sang in the song “Imagine,” “You may say I’m a dreamer. But I’m not the only one. I hope someday you’ll join us. And the world will be as one.”

## **About the Authors**

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***Center for Media Literacy (www.medialit.org):*** The Center for Media Literacy (CML) is dedicated to a new vision of literacy for the 21st Century: the ability to communicate competently in all media forms, as well as to access, understand, analyze and evaluate and participate with the powerful images, words and sounds that make up our contemporary media culture. CML's mission is to help children and adults prepare for living and learning in a global media culture by translating media literacy research and theory into practical information, training and educational tools for teachers and youth leaders, parents and caregivers of children.

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