CONNECT!ONS Med!aLit moments

In This Issue…

Theme: Citizen Journalism and the Future of News

Do you like to blog about current trends in your profession? Do you make your state-of-the-trade observations available to the public? You might be a citizen journalist.

The widespread availability of new media has generally encouraged the view that anyone can practice citizen journalism with relative ease. But without learning the digital citizenship skills which media literacy training provides, citizen journalists may be as likely to engage in self-censorship as they are to incur legal liability for the content they publish. These skills must be taught early on, and as USC media studies professor Henry Jenkins argues, schools need to create the conditions for youth to learn in social media environments the kind of personal and professional ethics students previously learned by working on high school newspapers (Online Safety Working Group report, p.3. Read more in our research article below).

The tasks taken on by citizen journalists both differ from and overlap with those performed by professional journalists. Citizen journalists may spend more time interacting with readers than their professional counterparts; and in major metropolitan centers, citizen journalists specialize in "hyper-local" down-to-the-neighborhood coverage (e.g., ChicagoTalks.org). Both professional journalists and citizen journalists will cover breaking news, but citizen journalists are particularly well suited to the task of live reporting on the ground. For example, the *Huffington Post* recruited nearly 12,000 volunteers for a professional/amateur (or "pro-am") project to cover the 2008 presidential election. Volunteers were dispatched to dozens of events occurring simultaneously across the country, and gained access to events--such as private fundraiser and campaign conference calls--where mainstream reporters often found themselves in pens (Michel, "Get Off the Bus," *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April 2009).

Quality is another issue of primary importance to the practice of citizen journalism today. Even if readers can access aggregated content from Yahoo or Google from citizen journalists writing from a variety of perspectives, it may not be accurate. And most citizen journalists do not have the training to conduct in-depth investigations and write concise, engaging stories based on their findings. Fortunately, a variety of organizations have been creating programs to productively utilize the skills of citizen journalists and cultivate the skills they still need to develop. Non-profit investigative news organization ProPublica has been capitalizing on the pro-am model of journalism. It launched an "Adopt a Stimulus Project" program last year which gave individual citizens guidelines or assignments for collection of local data on federal stimulus projects, and used the data to create what may be the most comprehensive publicly available analysis of stimulus spending to date. And several organizations, such as J-Lab at American University School of Communication, and News University at the Poynter Institute of Media Studies, have been recently formed to help citizen journalists enhance their skills.

Some professional journalists foresee the extinction of the craft of journalism at the hands of citizen journalists. Few observers have been commenting on the role of consumers in the production of quality news, however. One notable exception is Dan Gillmor, author of *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* (2004), and current director of the Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. In a blog post to the *Harvard Business Review*, Gillmor writes, "In the supply and demand system that guides all marketplaces, including the marketplace of ideas and information, we need better demand, not just more supply. We'll need to transform ourselves from passive consumers of media into active users" ("Want Better Journalism? Be a Smarter Media Consumer," "Now, New Next" blog, August 6, 2009).

One of the criteria for good news reporting is whether the information presented is actionable. Can the reader make decisions based on the information presented? Content aggregators generate a huge supply of information. Readers need good media literacy skills to determine whether the information they receive really is actionable. For example, did the expert quoted in the article also mention sources that we can investigate, or did the expert merely render an opinion? Greater demand for accurate, in-depth and well-documented reporting doesn't just keep greater numbers of skilled journalists employed -- it increases the likelihood that the news we read will help us make well-reasoned decisions concerning our health, our finances, and the future shape of our democratic institutions.

Research Highlights

News Literacy: And Where Did You Get That?

The number of college-age youth voting in elections has increased since the 2004 presidential election, and as Robert Putnam and Thomas Sandler argue in a 2005 *Washington Post* opinion piece, college freshmen have increasingly been discussing politics since the events of September 11th, 2001 ("Sept. 11 as Civics Lesson," September 10, 2005). But that political engagement may not be matched by a corresponding critical engagement with news media. According to a 2008 *New York Times* article, voters in this age group rely on e-mailed links and videos from friends and online connections as principal sources of news, bypassing mainstream media organizations as professional filters of information (Stelter, "Finding Political News Online, the Young Pass it On," March 27, 2008).

When former *Newsday* editor Howard Schneider was recruited to help found the School of Journalism at SUNY Stony Brook in 2006, the university suggested that he teach an introductory journalism course to undergraduates. Later, Schneider estimated that a third of the students in the class believed in the veracity of any information which flowed from a news source: "There was kind of an equity about it. *People Magazine*. CNN. Digg.com. If it looked like news, it must be true." Others were cynical. Others weren't sure how to read the news with a skeptical eye. "They would ask, do you think Michael Moore is a journalist?" Schneider's experience convinced him that the School's first mission should not be the training of journalists but the education of news consumers (conference video, "How the News Literacy Course Began at Stony Brook," News Literacy Conference at SUNY SB, March 11-13, 2009, http://www.newsliteracyconference.com/content/?p=406).

These events were the genesis of the Center for News Literacy and the News Literacy course at SUNY Stony Brook in 2007. The News Literacy course emphasizes five key skills, some of which should be familiar to students of media literacy:

1) Recognize the difference between journalism and other types of information, including publicity, advertisement, propaganda, entertainment, and unfiltered information
2) Recognize the difference between news and opinion
3) Analyze the difference between assertion and verification, and between evidence and inference
4) Deconstruct news reports based on evidence and reliability of sources, and apply those principles across all media platforms
5) Distinguish between news media bias and audience bias

Funded by a 2009 grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Center for News Literacy is now committed to teaching news literacy to 10,000 undergraduates from across all academic disciplines.

The News Literacy Project is another media literacy organization currently funded by the Knight Foundation. In 2008, *Los Angeles Times* investigative journalist Alan C. Miller talked about his career as a reporter to 175 sixth graders at his daughter's middle school in Bethesda, Maryland. Miller was prompted to leave his post at the *Times* to form the beginnings of the Project after receiving numerous thank-you notes indicating the substantial impact he had made on students. Miller recruited active and retired journalists to partner with K-12 classroom teachers with the goal of teaching students the skills they needed to become smarter consumers and creators of credible information across all media platforms.

Today, teachers participating in the Project are able to request journalists in their region who fit their curriculum, and can choose from a roster of nearly 75 journalists. Journalists and teachers present units that span six to ten classes, and lessons include many hand-on exercises, from board games in which players test their knowledge of First Amendment cases, to mock television shows warning students to test the reliability of online sources.

The Project has served over 1200 students in middle schools and high schools in the DC, New York and Chicago metropolitan areas, and is supported by 14 major news organizations, including *The New York Times* and NPR. Miller and other board members hope to add Los Angeles schools to the Project in the coming year.

The News Literacy Project may also help students make good decisions on how to filter news and information before they begin attending college. According to Daysha Williams, an eighth grade student at Williamsburg Collegiate who took one of the first News Literacy Project courses in winter 2008, "Now I get the gossip, and everything else that everyone's saying about the world. It's like okay, cool, but do you really know about it, or did you just get that from someone else?" (Garber, "Leap of Faith: Inside the Movement to Build an Audience of Citizens, *Columbia Journalism Review*, July/August 2009, p.3).

Visit the Center for News Literacy at: www.stonybrook.edu/journalism/newsliteracy/index.html

Learn more about the News Literacy Project by pointing your web browser to:
www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/

Online Safety and Technology Working Group Publishes Final Report

In June, the Online Safety and Technology Working Group issued the final version of its report "Youth Safety on a Living Internet" to members of Congress. The OSTWG was established by the Broadband Data Improvement Act of 2008 to review and evaluate:

- the status of industry efforts to promote online safety through education, parental control technologies, content labeling and other initiatives; and
- the status of industry efforts among internet service providers and online service providers regarding reporting of apparent child pornography, and record retention in connection with crimes against children.

The Working Group was comprised of 30 members. Among them were representatives from the business community, including ranking officers at Microsoft, Yahoo and Facebook; representatives from public interest groups, including the Internet Keep Safe Coalition and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children; and representatives from federal agencies, including the departments of Justice and Education, and federal commissions for Communication and Trade.

The Working Group had at its disposal the recorded acts of several commissions established since the Child Online Protection Act of 1998, but the findings of greatest interest to Working Group members stemmed from the deliberations of the Internet Safe Technology Task Force organized by the Harvard Berkman Center for Internet and Society in 2008. The ISTTF had been specifically charged with examining online safety tools, but enlarged the scope of its work to include a survey of academic research on youth risk online. Some of their findings were surprising. Peer-to-peer bullying and harassment emerged as a much larger threat than sexual predation on minors by adults.

The ISTTF findings had also highlighted the key role that young people increasingly play in their own safety online. In response, the final Working Group report explicitly calls attention to "the growing importance of online citizenship and media literacy education, in addition to what has come to be seen as online safety education. . ." (p.5), and recommends nationwide "digital citizenship and media literacy" education, a Digital Literacy Corps for schools and communities, research and assessment of effective strategies, and professional development of educators in the safe use of digital media.

The Working Group report makes numerous references to the Internet as a "living thing," a constantly changing reflection of the "individual and collective publications, productions, thoughts, and behaviors" of humanity (p.5); and the report repeatedly observes that, in light of these conditions, the best solutions for promoting child safety online requires ongoing negotiation among all stakeholders: providers of services and devices, parents, schools, government, advocates, healthcare professionals, law enforcement, legislators, and children themselves.   The Working Group report may be accessed at: http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reports/2010/OSTWG_Final_Report_060410.pdf

Media literacy is not a new subject to teach — but a new way to teach all subjects!

CML Participates in National Charter Schools Conference

The 10th National Charter Schools Conference was held in Chicago at the end of June. The conference, sponsored by The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, brought together teachers, administrators, and educational organizations for three days of lectures, workshops, and exhibits. Keynote speakers included Bill Gates and Arne Duncan.

CML's Tessa Jolls teamed with Brad Koepenick to lead a session on media literacy. Koepenick presented on his experience teaching media literacy and on student work that his students produced, including a branding campaign for the city of Van Nuys called "My Van Nuys." Koepenick teaches at CHAMPS school (Charter High School for the Arts – Multimedia and Performing) in Van Nuys, CA. He was the 2006 Charter Teacher of the Year in the State of California.

Jolls reviewed media literacy basics and introduced CML's new violence prevention curriculum for middle school students. For more information about the conference, go to http://nationalcharterconference.org/index.php

CONSORTIUM for MEDIA LITERACY

Uniting for Development

About us…

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products.

The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

Resources

Teaching Tip: Take stock of your personal experiences as a citizen journalist. Have you reported the news, expressed your views, or contributed to a blog? Keep notes that may help you to better teach your students about the responsibilities of being a citizen journalist.

News Literacy and Student Journalism Resources

News Trust (http://newstrust.net)
What can we really know about quality journalism if we don't have fresh examples to draw from? News Trust doesn't just aggregate news stories. It has a staff of professional journalists who rate current news stories and select the best news stories and opinion columns of the day. The site provides a structured feedback tool for users, and individuals and organizations can add this rating tool to their own websites. The site includes a useful introductory guide to news literacy.

Poynter Online (www.poynter.org)
The Poynter Institute for Media Studies has offered seminars for practicing and aspiring journalists and teachers of journalism since 1978. The website features news, analysis of news, articles and blogs on the profession of journalism, and resources for journalism teachers. Their News University offers online courses, some of which are free. This author tried the three-hour course "Watching TV News: How To Be a Smarter Viewer," designed by Marcy McGinnis of the SUNY Stony Brook School of Journalism, and was humbled by the task of evaluating his analysis of a sample news segment in comparison with an expert critique of the same story.

FactCheck.org and FactCheckEd.org (www.factcheck.org)
Fact Check features stories which demonstrate how individuals and organizations of every political stripe play fast and loose with the facts to support their respective points of view. FactCheckEd.org creates similar stories for K-12 students, features links to data sources useful for any news story, and offers lesson plans to help students critically examine the practice of politics. This is an excellent resource for reasoned discussion of controversial political topics.

J-Lab, the Institute for Interactive Journalism (www.j-lab.org)
J-Lab is an incubator for small online news organizations. Its J-Learning site (www.j-learning.org) offers advice and toolkits on a wide variety of topics, from limiting legal risks to making use of traffic data to attract a greater volume of visitors. Allied with this site is the Knight Citizen News Network, which focuses on community news and information.

"Practicing Journalism in Elementary Classrooms," by Leah Kohlenberg
In this article former *Time* reporter Leah Kohlenberg chronicles the difficulties and rewards of her year as a journalist-in-residence at a Seattle elementary school. The article shows the complexity of the tasks involved in plying the journalist's trade, as well as simple strategies for encouraging students to think and act like journalists. This article is part of a 2003 special report on "Young Readers" published online by the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University, and may be accessed at:
www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100913

Youth Media Reporter (www.youthmediareporter.org)
Many award-winning youth media organizations in the United States have few opportunities to engage in mutual reflection with sister organizations. Youth Media Reporter "engages a variety of stakeholders to define issues, pedagogies, and challenges to the youth media field." News literacy is the theme of the current issue (v. 4, n.3, published June 24, 2010), and showcases ways in which educators, journalists and organizers of youth media programs have helped young people develop information skills in their practice as media producers.

National Scholastic Press Association (www.studentpress.org)
The NSPA provides journalism education training programs, educational materials, media critique and recognition programs, analysis of developments in professional and student media, and an open forum for members to share their work. The NSPA's highest honor, the Pacemaker, is awarded annually for excellence in both print and online student journalism.

The *New York Times* Learning Network (http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/)
The *New York Times'* Learning Network is a free site for teachers, students and parents and includes content for grades 3-12. Each weekday the Learning Network offers new interactive activities, such as lesson plans, news summaries and quizzes, based on the reports in that week's *New York Times*.

Student Press Law Center (www.splc.org)
The Student Press Law Center is devoted to educating high school and college journalists about the rights and responsibilities embodied in the First Amendment and supporting student news media in their efforts to cover important issues free from censorship. In addition to providing free legal advice, the Center offers excellent educational resources on the legal and ethical frameworks informing the profession of journalism.

Med!aLit Moments

Telling the Unexpected, Or How a Good News Photo Delivers the Story

We've all done it. We read news articles in a hurry, browsing headlines until we settle on a story that interests us, and typically forget what it was that brought us "there." Did it promise to give a personal "angle" to a story that seemed too big and abstract by itself, like political violence in Iraq? Did the headline suggest that you might not be able to afford that trip to Europe this summer? Or did the photo bring you into the action at the World Cup final?

In this MediaLit Moment, your students will have the chance to explore how news organizations use photos to attract customers to their product, and how the creative techniques used in news photos can immediately telegraph the significance of a story to readers. This MediaLit Moment starts with only the photo itself, so it should keep your students guessing and having fun along the way!

Have students analyze the narrative and creative techniques of a news photograph

AHA!:   I want to read this article because of the interesting photo!

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?
Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

Grade Level: 8-10

Materials: Computer with high-speed internet access and classroom data projector; or printed copies of online news photo and news story.

Here's the link to the story, "Forget India, Outsource to Arkansas," from CNNMoney.com:
http://money.cnn.com/2010/07/08/smallbusiness/rural_onshoring/
In the photo, a man in a business suit stands next to a row of corn in a large cornfield. When you have found the story, "grab" and copy the photo and place it in a new window, then project or print the photo, depending on your instructional needs.

Activity: Project or pass out copies of the news photo, and let students know that they're going to learn about the difference between fact and opinion, which is an important skill to use whenever they read a news story. Ask them to describe the photo. What exactly do they see? What makes the photo worth a second look? Then invite them to make their best

guesses about the topic of the story, and ask them to explain why they believe their explanation is likely to be true. You might even want to take a vote to see whether any particular explanation wins out.

Next, display or pass out the news story, including headline, caption and full text. You may wish to briefly discuss outsourcing as a business practice with your students, including the political controversy that outsourcing can generate. Direct students' attention to the second paragraph, which is the lead paragraph for the story. You may wish to discuss how the essentials of the story are contained in this paragraph using the 5 W's and the H (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?) Next, ask students to compare and contrast the "true" story to the stories they invented to match the photo. At some point, ask, how is this photo a good match for the story they're reading now? How does it help tell the story?

Depending on the needs, interests and skills of your students, you can stop reading the article at this point, or read the first eight paragraphs (before the story discusses various companies and their onshoring strategies). Or you can adapt this lesson to accommodate a discussion of the entire story.

Finally, focus attention on one question: how does the photo heighten the reader's interest in the story? You might explain that news stories themselves attract people in different ways (e.g., by highlighting controversy, or the relevance of the story to people's lives). What's interesting about this story? (It's about something unusual or unexpected). What does the photo add to the story?

Analyzing the creative and narrative techniques deployed in this photograph is one of the most complex tasks for this activity, and we recommend that you allot the greatest amount of time to this portion of the activity. Consider how you would like to structure this analysis--individually, as a class, in small groups, or through some other instructional format (For example, you could distribute written materials on news values/criteria to an "expert" group of students and ask them to make a brief presentation to the rest of the class).

Extended Activity:
Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from this message?
Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

To some extent, the CNN Money article constructs a narrative in which large companies, regional labor contractors, state and local economic development agencies and rural employees are all enjoying a great honeymoon, if not a marriage made in heaven. Here are links to other articles on the topic written from other perspectives, or with other purposes in mind:

Rural Sourcing Could Mean Economic Boost for Arkansans
http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext/?nxd_id=329565
This is a television news story (with transcript) from a local station in Arkansas. It's also an example of "boosterism" in the traditional sense of the word. The short length and relatively simple premise of the story makes it a candidate for use within the main activity as well.

Eyewitness to Onshoring
http://www.mmsonline.com/articles/eyewitness-to-onshoring
This short expert interview from Modern Machine Shop online suggests that the explanations given in the CNN story for the increased use of "onshoring" are simplistic and unreliable.

'Onshoring' grows as trend to counter business outsourcing
http://www.scrippsnews.com/content/onshoring-grows-trend-counter-business-outsourcing
Article redefines onshoring as a regionalist alternative to outsourcing, and profiles a small toy company in San Francisco which appeals to consumers by producing quality toys and maintaining longer-term contracts with Bay Area producers and suppliers.

Outsourcing to Arkansas
http://news.cnet.com/8301-10784_3-5449083-7.html
A short CNET interview with Kathy White, Arkansas native and founder of Rural Sourcing, an IT firm with rural offices (and employees) in two states. In the interview, White appears as a savvy business strategist who also takes pride in the skills of rural workers.

Onshore Outsourcing: Made in America
http://www.informationweek.com/news/global-cio/outsourcing/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=162800086
This InformationWeek article is the only mainstream news article we've discovered online with any substantive discussion of the potential disadvantages and weaknesses of rural sourcing as a business strategy. This story is most appropriate for students at the 10th grade or higher.