CONNECT!ONS Med!aLit moments

In This Issue…

Theme: Digital Britain

British Government Unveils Media Literacy Plans

At the end of March, the British Government published its interim Digital Britain report, which outlines actions the United Kingdom can take to keep the UK competitive in the digital information and communications sector of the global economy. The Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Group, headed by the Office of Communications (Ofcom), concurrently issued a separate report on media literacy issues in relationship to the findings of the main Digital Britain Steering Board. In response to the wide-ranging recommendations of the Board, from fair and universal access to broadband networks to the development of skills to enable near-universal participation in the digital economy, the working group report expands the scope of media literacy education in a "digital context."

The working group report outlines three levels of participation in a digital society: digital inclusion, digital life skills, and digital media literacy. Digital inclusion is defined as the use of digital technology to improve the life chances of people, and efforts at digital inclusion are mainly concerned with physical access, support, motivation and confidence building. Education for digital life skills involves the acquisition and development of skills which will increase employment and social opportunities available to citizens. In the context of these first two levels of digital participation, the definition of media literacy becomes an overarching one, encompassing the ability to "use, understand and create digital media and communications." The authors of the report assert that the levels in the framework cannot be neatly separated, but instead form a continuum of experience for most learners. A brief profile from the report provides a case in point. Jessica, a girl now 17 years old, had fallen behind in school some years earlier. By attending one of the UK's many online learning centers as an alternative school, she not only gained confidence in using digital technologies, but also gained the skills and credentials she needed to apply for college admission.

In its current work towards digital inclusion, the national government has been conducting a pilot of its Home Access program, which funds disadvantaged families with school age children to purchase computers and broadband connections. The working group report also calls for the appointment of an independent Digital Inclusion Champion (i.e., an Advocate) as well as a supporting task force. The Champion would drive the work and guide both policy thinking and priorities for practical delivery of services.

Though plans for digital life skills initiatives are still in different phases of research and review, one existing program offers both digital inclusion and digital life skills experiences to adult learners. Public service Channel 4's "Embarrassing Bodies" program is built on TV, web and mobile phone platforms, and offers viewers access to relevant content on health issues, helps direct web users to information about specific medical conditions and appropriate support groups, and enables both web and mobile users to download "Self-Check" videos.

The BBC has had a mandate to promote media literacy since 2006, and plays a key role in

Digital Britain media literacy initiatives. One example of an existing BBC media literacy program is the BBC News School Report, which gives 11-14 year-olds at 500 or more British schools the opportunity to make and broadcast their own news. Echoing conclusions of the main report, the working group report also recommends the appointment of a Media Literacy Champion within the BBC.

In its final recommendations, the Digital Britain Media Literacy Working Group is unequivocal in its support for full integration of media literacy education in British schools, and recommends that schools embed media literacy across primary, secondary and adult learning curricula in subjects as diverse as information and communications technology, English Language and Communications, and Health and Wellbeing. The report also calls for the development of standards, level descriptions and assessments, as well as guidance to ensure that schools understand how digital and media literacy competencies can be developed and embedded in schools.

The interim report may be accessed at:
http://www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/media_lit_digital_britain/

Since the time of this writing, Ofcom has released a final report outlining the Government's strategic vision for Digital Britain. Access the final report here:
http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/broadcasting/6216.aspx

Research Highlights

On the Other Side of the Digital Divide: Hesitants, Economisers and Resistors

Since 2006, the British Office of Communications (Ofcom) has conducted media literacy "audits" to gauge the readiness of UK citizens to participate in a digital society. Ofcom expanded its audit research in 2008, and decided to analyze some of its data by segmenting interview subjects into profiles that described their level of engagement with digital technologies. These profiles ranged from "engaged" and "pragmatists" to "hesitants," "economisers," and "resistors." On April 1st, Ofcom published a report titled "Digital Lifestyles," which contained their most detailed research to date on UK citizens who fall into the hesitant, economiser and resistor categories.

The 2008 audit involved face-to-face home interviews with 2,905 adults aged 16 and over. Among those interviewed, hesitators numbered 998, representing 31% of UK adults. Hesitators were far more numerous than economisers and resistors, who respectively represented 8% and 10% of the UK adult population (with 258 and 292 interviews each).

According to Ofcom's thumbnail profiles of these populations, hesitators are likely to own and use a mobile phone, but often live in households with digital technologies they don't use. When asked about using digital technologies, they are most likely to say "Someone else does that." Economisers freely use all digital technologies but the internet, which they perceive as unaffordable, and are likely to say "I'd really like to be able to do that." As the name suggests, resistors rarely use digital technologies, though they may have digital televisions at home. They are likely to cite voluntary reasons for their limited digital engagement, and most likely to say "It's just not for me."

Hesitators tend to be 65 and over, though 4 in 10 are under 44. They are more likely to fall into lower middle or lower socioeconomic groups and are less likely to be working than the overall adult population. Resistors are more likely than the general population to be 65 or older, tend to be retired females, and tend to fall into lower socioeconomic groups. They are also more likely to have a health condition or disability than the average population. Economisers are aged 16 to 34, and tend to fall into lower middle or lower socio-economic groups.

Economisers tend to be the savvy ingénues of the three groups. They have greater confidence with using cell phone technologies than the general population, and are more interested in learning about all digital technologies, including the internet, yet they are relatively unaware of how content on any platform is funded, and tend to lack confidence in using the internet for communication and transactions.

Both hesitators and economisers are less confident than the general population in evaluating online content. In fact, they are less likely than the general population to evaluate new websites before they use them. Yet they also tend to have greater concern about the security of personal information that they release online.

Resistors are clearly a desired target for Ofcom's digital inclusion efforts. While Ofcom's research has identified needs for digital life skills among hesitants and economisers, their difficulties with assessing the reliability of online sites and content seems to call for media literacy education for critical awareness.

The full report may be accessed at:
www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/medlitpubrss/digital_lifestyles/

National Standards Movement Gets a Boost

Earlier in this newsletter, we profiled Achieve, Inc, an organization working towards college- and career-ready standards for instruction in schools nationwide. In 2004, Achieve released its report *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts*, which included a series of English and Mathematics benchmarks. The English benchmarks for grades 4-12 included strands for "viewing" and "producing digital media," raising the possibility that media literacy benchmarks might be included in curricular frameworks across all 50 states.

Over the last few months, the movement towards common standards appears to have gained momentum. In December 2008, Achieve, the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers released its report *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring US Students Receive a World-class Education*. In addition to calling for benchmarks which can be evaluated against the standards of educational offices worldwide, the report outlines a series of steps states can take to produce students who are competitive in a global marketplace. And at its winter meeting in February, the National Governors Association adopted a policy statement endorsing a process to develop common academic standards by comparing student performance on international tests.

In March, Achieve released a report which evaluated the progress of states towards common standards over the last four years. When its American Diploma Project was launched in 2005, Achieve published a list of 19 states which had aligned their standards with the expectations of college and the workplace. According to the recent report, 23 states have aligned their standards, and another 14 anticipated that they would align their standards sometime in 2009. In most cases, the process of developing aligned standards occurred through formal collaborative partnerships between K-12 and post-secondary educational systems, with significant input from business representatives.

In the last few months, the Obama Administration has also begun to weigh in on the issue of common standards. Arne Duncan, President Obama's recently appointed Secretary of Education, remarked that ". . . having 50 different state standards just doesn't work. Which is why we have called for states to adopt higher standards that truly prepare young people for college or work" (Quaid, "Schools to Begin Receiving Economic Stimulus Money," Associated Press, April 1, 2009). In April, Duncan released the first $44 billion in economy stimulus

money directed to schools, and the criteria for renewed funding also signals the Obama Administration's educational priorities. Among those criteria are the creation of "rigorous" standards, and establishment of data systems linking information from preschool to higher education--the latter of which is promoted by Achieve as primary means for measuring the effectiveness of 'aligned' standards. With these added federal incentives, it seems likely that the movement for national standards will continue to gain traction.

CML News

http://www.house.gov/writerep

Express Yourself
We invite you to write your Congressional representative to express the need for media literacy education in our schools.

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.   www.consortiumformedialiteracy.org

Media Literacy Resources

Teaching Tip: Check into your students' world by asking "what's going on in your world right now that's cool/uncool, fascinating, unfair, outrageous or worrisome?" Once you've got a list, keep your eyes and ears peeled for examples from their world that you can use to illustrate concepts in the classroom.

Featured sites in this issue:

http://www.Achieve.org

http://www.ConsortiumforMediaLiteracy.org

http://www.Ofcom.org.uk

http://www.WhiteHouse.gov

Med!aLit Moments

Image Builders

In the 1930's, Franklin Roosevelt used the new medium of radio in an attempt to win voter support for his New Deal policies. And seventy years later, Barack Obama is using a variety of web tools to attract support for his policies. On the http://www.Whitehouse.gov website, you'll find transcripts of press briefings, blogs, and photos, all of which can be exported to a variety of social media applications. The site also includes videos of our President at various town halls and events, and frequent video addresses in which Obama makes his case directly to voters. The material on this site is selected by someone in the White House and is posted to create a positive image of our country's leadership. More and more, politicians understand how the use of media can positively impact public image and help gain support among voters. Take a look at this image of President Obama at the recent Summit of the Americas: http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/gallery/2009/04/summit-of-the-americas-behind-the-scenes.php?img=21

The social environment conveyed in this photo is casual, yet Obama is clearly a leader who has ideas to discuss with the Congressional delegation in the photo. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will take a stand on issues they care about, and also learn how to create an image of themselves as leaders taking action on those issues.

Have your students create a "photo opportunity" at school which projects an image of leadership

AHA!: A picture showing me "in action" can inspire other people to support my cause!

Key Question #5 for Producers: Have I communicated my purpose effectively?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Grade Level: 8+

Materials: any camera, whether personal, disposable, or digital. Ask your students to think about an issue they feel deserves attention. It could be the school's lunch policy or the need for a gymnasium or theater program. Or students could identify an individual or group whom they believe deserve praise for their contributions to the campus community.

Next, ask your students to think of a photo opportunity for themselves which could also help draw popular support for the issue or person they've chosen. They could be presenting an award. They could be having a serious discussion with the principal. They could be "caught"

in an act of service. You may wish to use photos from Whitehouse.gov to discuss the kinds of scenarios which are typically used to project images of leadership.

Students should also produce some writing for this activity which helps to establish the purpose of the photo-op. At a minimum, students should write a caption which helps to frame the importance of the scene which has been captured in the photograph. With more time allotted to this activity, students could write a blog, a position statement, or a plea for support.

If at all possible, give your students the opportunity to use the photo as a presentation tool as they discuss their issue before the class. Doing so should help ensure that students choose an issue which is of genuine concern to them.

The way in which photo opportunities are created and displayed depends on your students' technical sophistication, the sophistication of the equipment you have available, and the imagination of you and your students.