A Media Literacy Year in Review
At a time when many of us are rushing to fill that stocking, we thought it might be good to share our thoughts on the people and events that gladdened our hearts in 2012. The future promises hope and good cheer to media literacy educators, too. Our theme article shows media literacy awareness on the rise, from Moscow to Mindanao.

Media Literacy Resources
We offer a nice, warm batch of great resources from Connections newsletters.

Med!aLit Moments
We are pleased to announce that we have compiled 27 MediaLit Moments into one book! This is ideal for teachers looking for quick ‘AHA’ media literacy activities in the classroom.
In 2012, we’ve been heartened by an accelerating international exchange of ideas on media and education. In June, the Russian Federation hosted a conference in Moscow which publicized a new UNESCO media and information literacy curriculum, and discussed progress in and challenges to implementation from Russia to Hong Kong. Among other presentations, the Brazilian ICT Studies Center discussed the findings of its sophisticated, in-depth survey of media use among children.

In the U.S., the State Department organized an educational program for 21 international visitors on the topic of “Media Literacy: Promoting Civil Society Through New Media.” Participants in the program formed a truly diverse group. Among them were the chief editor of the Egypt Daily News, the Bhutanese Director of Information and Media, and a parish priest in Mindanao, Southern Philippines, in charge of an organization producing documentaries on the negative impacts of armed conflicts in the region. In March, CML President and CEO Tessa Jolls led the group in a half-day workshop on the Key Questions and Core Concepts of media literacy, including activities targeting both media deconstruction and construction skills.

In September, the Journal of Children and Media published an article by Theresa Webb and Kathryn Martin titled Evaluation of a US School-Based Media Literacy Violence Prevention Curriculum on Changes in Knowledge and Critical Thinking Among Adolescents. The article evaluates the effectiveness of CML’s Beyond Blame violence prevention curriculum. Unfortunately, violence continues to dominate many news headlines and media images, so that audiences everywhere must learn to deal with media violence and violence in general, whether they believe themselves to be affected or not. Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media builds on CML’s tradition of addressing important societal issues through media literacy education. The quantitative analysis evaluating the curriculum found that students who had participated in the study with a trained teacher significantly increased their understanding of the effects of media violence and of the core concepts of media literacy. This study makes a substantial contribution to the evidence supporting the effectiveness of media literacy education, and we’re grateful that anyone with a passion to start a media literacy program in their school or community will be able to present their case with increasing confidence. Access the article.

In winter of this year, CML released Media Literacy: A System for Learning AnyTime, AnyWhere, a three-part series of resources on the vital role of media literacy in 21st century education. Among other things, these resources demonstrate the versatility of the Key Questions and Core Concepts of media literacy and how they can be applied to deconstruction and construction. This process of inquiry can be used to generate questions for critical thinking in any curricular subject; for student self-assessment; as a resource for project management in media production programs; and as a starting point for students to inquire about their identities and the roles they play as citizens in a networked age.
For our June issue of *Connections*, we interviewed LA Unified School District media arts educator Dain Olsen on his methods for infusing media literacy skills into media production classes. Olsen’s interview provided a snapshot of a program that takes students through a complete cycle of experimenting with tools, learning how to read media texts, critical evaluation of commercial media, reflective production, and full participation in assessment. Regarding assessment, Olsen commented, “Just by dragging and dropping, students not only turn their work into me, they can see all the work that pops up immediately on the classroom screen. . .It’s overt, in public, and rigorous, even group vetted. The kids sometimes don’t buy into what they see. It’s accelerated the learning process and propelled it.”

In August, we reported on the rapid growth of personal data management services, and commented on the implications of this new information market. With personal data so valuable to online advertisers and marketers, the relationships expressed in the media triangle of text, audience and producer take a novel turn. When advertisers use personal data to target and serve advertisements to consumers online, consumers aren’t just audiences for the ads, they become assets for producers, in much the same way that actors and models represent “talent” to be drawn upon for production. We believe that media literacy education is urgently needed so that consumers themselves can draw back the curtain on the practices of commercial entities which utilize their personal data, learn how to control access to their information, and demand a fair value for its use.

We also express our deep appreciation for the life and work of Barry Duncan, a founding member of the Canadian Association for Media Literacy, who passed away in June following a long struggle with Parkinson’s Disease. In a personal tribute to Duncan, Len Masterman wrote, “Barry was an educational pioneer. . .a progressive teacher whose starting point was always the issues and experiences which students were encountering outside of class. His concept of the ‘teachable moment’—scraping your pre-planned ideas, going with the issues and stories which were capturing the imagination and energy of your students, and thereby utilizing all of the resources which the media bring to contemporary events—still strikes me as being at the heart of what media education is all about—topicality, vitality, creativity, with teacher and students working together to research an issue’s wider contexts and implications. Nobody explicated that vision with greater authority and clarity than Barry.”

We’re grateful, too, for advocates who--despite roadblocks and challenges--have demonstrated their continuing commitment to media literacy education. In 1999, media literacy educators Frank Baker and Robert Kubey conducted a survey of state teaching standards which found elements of media literacy in the standards of almost every state. In our April issue, we interviewed Baker, who registered his disappointment with Common Core language arts standards, which target skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking but omit any reference to viewing. Undeterred, Baker drafted media literacy standards which have been successfully incorporated into the Visual and Performing Arts Standards in his home state of South Carolina.
In short, we’re grateful for the progress of media literacy awareness in classrooms around the country, and in all corners of the globe. And we’re grateful for your contributions—as parents, teachers and professionals in so many different fields—to that developing awareness.

*Warm wishes for the holidays and continued success in 2013!*
Resources for Media Literacy

Connections’ Top Media Literacy Resources of 2012

Media Literacy: A System for Learning AnyTime, AnyWhere
Available at: www.medialit.org
This trilogy of resources offers a complete package for applying CML’s framework for media literacy to all curricular subjects, including resources for Change Management, Deconstruction, and Critical Construction. Each part includes a corresponding e-book, Professional Development module, and Tools for Implementation. This is an ideal resource for administrators and staff who want to implement a comprehensive and systematic media literacy program in their district or school with a research-based framework. Two e-books on Change Management and Deconstruction/Construction may be freely accessed at the CML website. Other Trilogy resources can be found in the online store.

In our June issue, we reported on the Google “Big Tent Event” held in Mountain View, California. Google convened 14 additional Big Tent events in 2012, on a variety of topics related to media literacy, from events on “internet and society” in London and Istanbul, events on freedom of expression in Madrid and Baku, Azerbaijan, to an event in Sendai, Japan on the role of technology in disaster preparedness and relief.

From Issue #36, “Media Literacy and the Monsters We Love”

Bishop doesn’t just describe the ‘developmental stages’ in the zombie genre. He also sensitively traces the way in which zombie films have responded to real-world social issues.

Using oral historian Studs Terkel’s The Good War as a source of inspiration, Brooks positions the narrator as the agent of a United Nations commission gathering first-person accounts of the zombie apocalypse and the human-zombie conflict which followed. An international group of interviewees contribute to the reader’s understanding of the religious, geo-political and environmental aftermath of the Zombie War. One possible use for this text in the classroom is as a resource for a simulation game, much like the Civilization series of strategy games.

In December 2011, Krista Tippett of American Public Media’s radio program “On Being” interviewed Diane Winston, Knight Chair of Media and Religion at the USC Annenberg
School of Communication. Winston has much to say about religious themes and symbolism in AMC’s “The Walking Dead,” and discusses provocative questions about good and evil posed on series such as “Dexter” and “Breaking Bad.”


While Nail’s essay comes under some slight critique in this issue, this is one of those rare articles about the zombie genre which discusses pedagogical strategies at length rather than mentioning a few topics for classroom discussion. Moreover, Nail takes a media literacy approach by supporting students in the task of examining film characters—including zombies—from multiple perspectives.

From Issue #41, “Media Literacy and Personal Data Management”


The news stories referenced above offer some of the most in-depth reporting available on online advertising networks and the market for personal data management services.


In this book, Searls renders a detailed sketch of a market in which consumers use online tools to declare which goods or services they are ‘in the market’ for and to receive bids from competing vendors customized to stated price range, as well as time, place and manner of delivery. While the technical architecture for such a “user-centric” web is in its beginning stages, Searls’ discussion of the social and economic principles for this transformation encourages readers to reclaim the power they have too often ceded to advertisers and marketers in the current online marketplace.


With this book, Turow, a Professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, probes the inner workings of our system of online commerce, and arrives at a portrait of an advertising “food chain” in which advertisers and marketers hold nearly all of the advantages. Consumers are positioned near the bottom of that chain. Advertisers work with data “brokers” to assemble detailed profiles of individual consumers, then sort them into “targets” or “waste.” Turow deftly summarizes the stakes: “…social discrimination via reputation silos may well mean having sectors of your life labeled by companies you don’t know, for reasons you don’t understand, and with data that you did not grant permission to use” (p.192).

As Leibowitz compares the relationships between paparazzi and celebrities with the relationships between online advertisers and consumers, he vividly (and quite humorously) illuminates the imbalance of power between advertisers and consumers. Leibowitz also discusses the need for understandable and transparent privacy policies, and for meaningful consumer choices in the form of Do Not Track mechanisms; and he does a good job of explaining the principle of ‘privacy by design,’ in which companies design tools, practices and policies for data collection and retention with consumer privacy as a goal, rather than as an afterthought.


This report takes a global view of personal data as it is currently utilized by the public and private sectors, and by consumers themselves. It also makes recommendations for expanding individual ‘privacy by design’ initiatives into the architecture for a user-centric web. Central to those recommendations are identity verification systems—“trust frameworks”-- which can lead to a balance of power between all stakeholders in the “personal data ecosystem.” The report offers a few hypothetical individual case studies to illustrate the proposed benefits of such a system.

From Issue #42, Media Literacy and Video Games


Only in his chapter on “Videogames, History and Education” does Brown hold a sustained discussion of the potential of videogames as a pedagogical tool. But that’s no reason to abandon the book. Brown explores a number of topics with regard to video games, from video games as works of art to video games as ethical “texts.” In almost all his chapters, he exhibits analytic precision while remaining largely accessible to non-academic readers.


Gee is quick to admit that he is only arguing for the implicit learning potential of video games. What makes Gee’s book stand out from other works in this crowded field is his lucid analysis of the linkages between sociocultural approaches to learning and the learning principles he finds embedded in the games he discusses in each chapter. In doing so, he makes it possible for teachers to gain a broad understanding of the implications of gameplay for classroom practice. That’s a worthy accomplishment.

This book is an ideal text for understanding the social and economic contexts in which media are produced. The essays in this anthology make a persuasive case that video games are not only marketed narrowly to “hard-core” male gamers, but that hiring practices in the game publishing and design industry are largely tilted towards this demographic as well. It effectively deploys audience research to make the case the game publishing industry is losing potential revenues by placing both men and women in narrow marketing categories. A number of chapters also describe efforts to create games which can appeal to girls, develop their sense of self-efficacy, and help them learn programming and other STEM skills.


McGonigal’s argument for the potential of games to motivate social change may seem a little starry-eyed at times, but her analyses of a wealth of games, especially massively-multi-player alternate reality games, demonstrate how games can function as remarkable tools for marshaling resources and people for common purposes.


Ian Bogost’s essay in this volume, “The Rhetoric of Video Games,” is perhaps the best, most concise source available which demonstrates how one can conduct a close analysis of a video game. These essays make a seminal contribution to the interdisciplinary field of ‘games and learning’ which should not be missed.

Quest to Learn School  [www.q2l.org](http://www.q2l.org)

Quest to Learn is a public charter school in New York City for grades 6-12 which uses the underlying principles of games to create immersive game-like learning experiences for students. For example, students work in small teams to complete short, opt-in “missions” in different subjects. Completing missions allows students to “level up” to a point of mastery at their own pace. The school’s curriculum is interdisciplinary, with a focus on systems learning and thinking. Q2L opened its doors in 2009 after two years of planning by teachers, academics and game designers, and receives funding from the MacArthur Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

**MediaLit Moments**

Every month we publish a new MediaLit Moment to provide teachers with a quick AHA activity for the classroom. We have compiled 27 fun media literacy activities into a single book for easy access and convenience. The MediaLit Moments book is organized by Key Question and suggested grade level, and includes activities for deconstruction and construction. CML’s Q/TIPS chart is also included for reference. Go to [www.medialit.org/store](http://www.medialit.org/store) for more information. Want to receive *Connections* in your inbox?  [Sign up] today!