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Why History Matters for Media Literacy Education

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Abstract

The ways people have publicly discussed and written about media literacy in the past have great bearing on how citizens, educators and learners are able to think about and practice their own media literacy. Our concepts of media literacy have evolved over time in response to changing contexts of media studies and educational discourses as well as changes in communication technologies, media industries, politics, and popular culture. My research on the history of *Media & Values* magazine 1977-1993, made possible by the Elizabeth Thoman Media Literacy Archive, illustrates how tracing developments of media literacy concepts over time can give us much needed perspective on the discursive contexts that constitute our field of media literacy practices today. In *Media & Values*, media literacy emerges from its historical contexts as a means for reform, a practice of understanding representation/reality, and a pedagogy of social analysis and inquiry. Each of these themes constructs media literacy as an intervention in power, but at different conceptual levels—addressing institutions; demystifying ideology; and negotiating identities. These historical constructions lend perspective for understanding our diverse approaches to media literacy education today in terms of how we constitute power relations among learners, educators, media makers and users, and media texts, technology and industry.

Keywords: *media literacy, history, Center for Media Literacy, Media and Values, archive, research*

In the following keynote speech at the *Symposium on the Historical Roots of Media Literacy* held at the University of Rhode Island, Sept. 20, 2013, I made a case for the importance of media literacy history and illustrated the value of the Elizabeth Thoman Media Literacy Archive by exploring some ideas that emerge from a close examination of *Media & Values* magazine, a project of the organization that became the Center for Media Literacy in Los Angeles.

First, my working definition of a history of media literacy: The history of media literacy is a story of people's organized efforts to develop and practice the knowledge and skills of media communication necessary to participate and claim power in societies where media play increasingly important roles.

Here, media includes messages, modes, texts, technologies and institutions, which play important roles in personal experience, social relations, identity, public health, politics, economics, and culture. So, what can we learn from such a story? Let's look at what's out there for media literacy history.

We can learn about past models for practice that might otherwise be lost in the blowing sands of

time—as with Brown's 1991 study of critical viewing curricula, *Television "Critical Viewing Skills" Education*, meant to be an encyclopedia of practices from the 1970s and 1980s; or, Dana Polan's, *Scenes of Instruction* (2011), which recovers early 20th century practices in U.S. film studies. Models of past practice can inform current work, but also call attention to how the contexts of our historical moment shape what we do by situating past pedagogy.

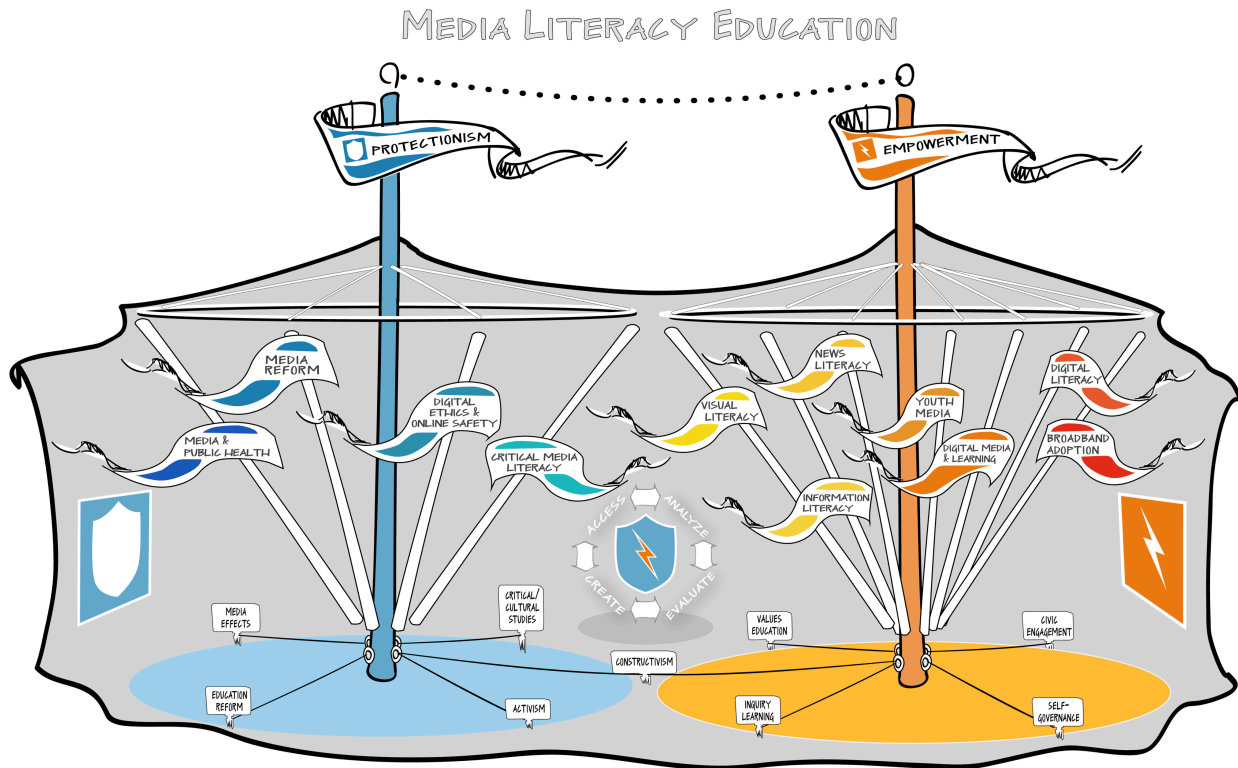
We can hear voices of the pioneers in our field who broke ground for the work we do today. We hear about their challenges and inspirations, their hopes looking forward based on their experiences from the past. Oral history serves this purpose, and we see its potential in the recent work of Tessa Jolls and the Center for Media Literacy, which published long-form interview transcripts with 20 media literacy pioneers (Jolls 2011). Analysis of such oral histories can find trends in field development by comparing the recollections of prominent leaders, and consider contexts that influenced these trends, as Rangit Tigga shares in his 2009 dissertation where he found evidence that the U.S. media literacy field's formative years were in the 1970s with a regression in the 80s and a revitalization in the 90s. Seeing

trends in the past may help us understand our present and strategize future directions.

We can also learn about the institutional history of media literacy efforts, as in *Screen Education*, Terry Bolas's (2009) inside view of how relations between the British Film Institute and the Society for Education in Television and Film shaped media education in Britain. And, as the scholars in

Marcus Leaning's edited book, *Issues in Information Literacy: Education, Practice, and Pedagogy* (2009), explore in a variety of international contexts. The intrigue of how things got done, by whom, with what money, under what political and economic climates—are all fascinating and lend perspective for what we do today.

Figure 1: Media Literacy's Big Tent



So, that's it, pretty much, for media literacy historiography, so far. Obviously, we have a deficit of history in the field. Perhaps this is, in part, because media literacy has been a response to our rapidly changing media and communication technologies, which has kept the field in a constant state of flux, always looking at the present with an eye to the future. This, fixation on the present and future leaves our young field without a strong foundation from which to grow. I think history can help. We need history in order to understand how different people, using a common definition of media literacy, do media literacy so differently. Personally, I see great value in approaches to media literacy across our diverse strands of practice. But, our diversity can also be a barrier to communication

and growth. Let me share an anecdote about some consulting work I did to try to help a client planning the rollout of a traveling museum exhibit who wanted to reach out to media literacy educators. To help the client understand the many strands of practice that all claim media literacy as their territory, I developed this visual of the “Big Tent Model of MLE.”¹ [See Figure 1 for an illustration of the Big Tent Model of Media Literacy].

¹ This model was accompanied by a paper, “Field Guide to Media Literacy,” originally written to facilitate outreach for a museum client, which is posted as a working paper by RobbGrieco and Hobbs (2013) at the Media Education Lab. Visual design of the Big Tent Model is by Michael RobbGrieco and Mike Fleisch of the Manufacturing Company.

This is a working model to show how our common definition—the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms (Aufderheide & Firestone 1993)—is used in strands of practice revolving around polls of protectionism and empowerment paradigms with roots of the practices supporting the polls on stakes at the base. Within protectionism, the blue flags, current strands of practice offer resistance and guidance in overcoming harmful influences and oppressive ideologies to transform society, policy, and media use for the better; and within the empowerment paradigm, different strands on the orange flags offer the development of skills for thinking about and using media to participate more fully in our democracy, economy and cultures. And this model doesn't even include the diverse settings where educators ply their trades—in libraries, K-12 classes, youth groups, college courses, and so on. In order to facilitate my client's outreach efforts, I had to explain how the language of teaching and learning about media differs in each of these strands, and I found that it helped immensely to know how these differences evolved from particular historical contexts.

Without resources of history, it's difficult for practitioners to speak across these discourse communities to share and productively debate the state of media literacy today and for the future. History can provide a common language for understanding tensions, disconnects and opportunities for collaboration between our different strands where stakeholders all claim media literacy as their domains. Communication in the field of media literacy education (MLE) gets complicated to the point of being unproductive when members of different strands engage in arguments over best practices without understanding or recognizing their differences in knowledge base, purposes, settings, and constituents. For example, in the recent debate in the *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, Renee Hobbs (2011) pointed out that James Potter (2010) portrayed *The State of Media Literacy* from a protectionist perspective only and missed out on a lot more going on in the field, which Potter (2011) dismissed as Hobbs promoting her personal experiences and political agenda. Or, put another way, Potter treated a widely published researcher, Hobbs, as a hopeful advocate without substance for

her claims. Potter's argument channeled The Dude from *The Big Lebowski*, basically saying, "Yeah, well, that's just like, your opinion, man" (Coen & Coen 1998). And while Hobbs (2011b) could point to a laundry list of examples of research from the empowerment paradigm, she could not draw on a history that maps the development of concepts, practices, and conversations between discourses that have produced "The State of Media Literacy" today. That's the sort of history of the field I am trying to contribute because such debates persist without historical perspective.

And that is what it all comes down to for me. We need perspective, historical perspective. Without it, to echo McLuhan (1964), we are like fish in water, never aware of the context in which we swim. Histories of our field can show us how contexts of politics, economics, technological change, popular culture and intellectual ideas have interacted to produce the practices of media literacy in the past so we may become more aware of how such contexts position us and what we do with media literacy today. The contrasts, the differences, are what make our present contexts visible against the backdrop of historical research.

But wait, you might say, our field is so young, we've only been talking about media literacy for fifty years or so, nothing in historical terms—how can we gain perspective from histories of things that have yet to resolve. Yes, good point. There are certainly limitations in working with living history, people and documents with actively evolving senses of significance; but there are also advantages. As historian Renee Romano (2012) says, we must seize upon a productive distance when doing recent history. My own research spans the production run of *Media & Values* magazine from 1977-1993. One way that I justify my choice to study this recent period is for its dual sense of relevance to and distance from the present state of media literacy education in the U.S. In short, I believe that, because of the seeming accelerated change in media, communication, and technology along with contingent changes in social and economic spheres in the United States, the twenty to thirty year gap offers a productive balance of hindsight for both recognizing what is particular to the past and what may be relevant to our present with regard to ideas

about media literacy. So, let's look at my research on *Media&Values* magazine.

Media&Values Magazine as History

To connect grassroots & scholarly efforts in media education, the magazine was created in a media studies graduate class at USC by a Catholic nun and former high school journalism teacher, Sister Elizabeth Thoman, who would later co-found many important national membership groups of media literacy educators. *Media&Values* was the flagship publication of the Center for Media and Values, later the Center for Media Literacy, the leading national non-profit organization promoting media education in the U.S. in the 1990s. It ran for 63 issues from 1977-1993, growing to a distribution of over 10,000, and spanning the shift from a mostly protectionist paradigm, towards empowerment approaches to media education in its final years.

Special interest magazines in American history. *Media&Values* was published following a major shift in the history of the American magazine amidst a thriving culture of special interest magazines, which not only reflected contemporary societal changes, but also acted as catalysts, "shaping social reality" (Abrahamson 2007, 667). They create for readers a sense of co-membership in a discourse community of shared interests and knowledge, and often instruct readers towards some form of expertise and action. Insofar as *Media&Values* magazine fits this genre, it's content may be representative of key concepts and practices of the media literacy movement from the period.

Historical methods—document and discourse analyses. I use a combination of traditional historical document analysis, a process of reading texts of primary sources in search of patterns and themes that address research questions (Howell and Prevenier 2011), and, critical discourse analysis, an assessment of how statements in the archive form the rules of shared discursive practice around particular concepts developing within networks of historical discourses (Saukko 2003; Fairclough 1992), which considers effects on power relations among constituents (Foucault 1980, 1972). I also use Quentin Skinner's approach to analyzing speech acts, which emphasizes authors' intentions, affording

the ability to treat the magazine's creators as historical actors (Skinner 2005).

My research investigates three questions:

1. What discourses of theory and practice from media studies, education and beyond were at play in the texts of *Media&Values*? How do they appear, disappear, persist, change, or remain absent through the run of the magazine?
2. How do those discourses produce subject positions and organize power relations among the people, institutions, texts, and technologies discussed?
3. What intentions were behind the editorial choices in addressing, positioning, representing and omitting certain audiences?

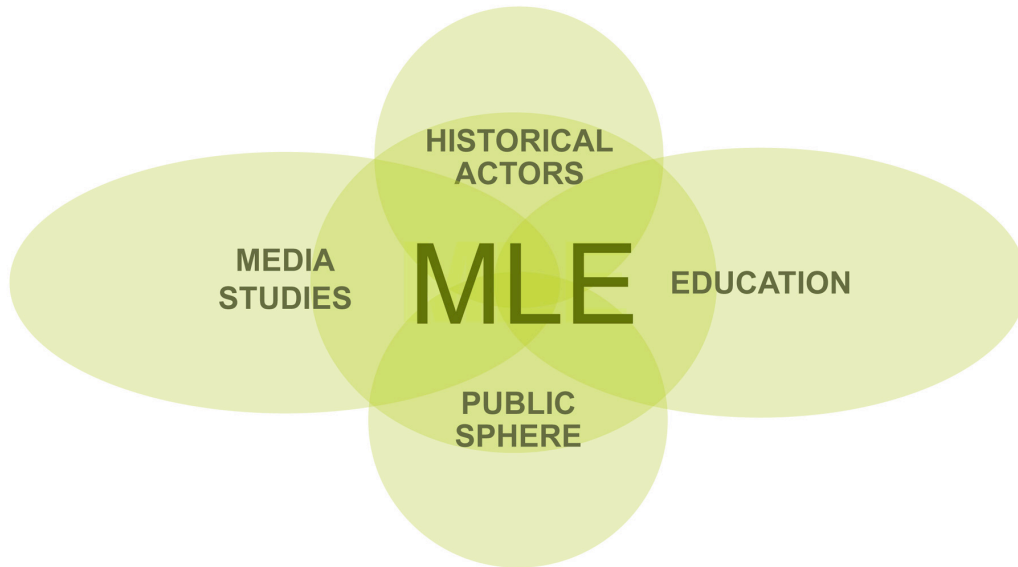
Theoretical Framework and Historical Contexts

So here's an introduction to what I mean by looking at discursive formations. [See Figure 2: Theoretical Framework and Historical Contexts, on the following page]. To understand how concepts of media literacy emerged historically, we must consider the discourses of media studies and education that made it possible to talk about, conceive of, and practice media literacy, as well as the identities of historical actors and what was going on in the public sphere during the run of the magazine. First, let's look at what was happening with media studies discourses.

Media effects. The resurgence of the media effects paradigm in the decades leading to the publication of the magazine, with influential government studies of TV's influence on violence framed by cultivation and social cognitive theories (Gerbner et al. 1994; Bandura 1977; Rubin 1994), had implications for media literacy education. Media effects often positions learners as vulnerable and passive (Potter 2004; Grossberg 1992), encouraging protectionist approaches and privileging the teacher's position to decide what is harmful (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994). My study looks at how these discourses and their theoretical implications for media literacy education (MLE) play out in the magazine.

Figure 2: Theoretical Framework and Historical Contexts

Situating Discourses Constituting MLE in M&V



Critical and critical cultural studies. Critical theory conceives of passive audiences at a macro-level of analysis as constructed by the media they consume. So the mass media audiences are passive dupes of the culture industries (Adorno and Horkheimer 1972), which positions the MLE teacher as enlightened critic snapping them out of passivity with expert knowledge of political economy and semiotic production of ideology. From the critical cultural perspective, audiences employ cultural codes, appropriating preferred, negotiated or oppositional meanings for mass media (Hall and Jefferson 1977). MLE aimed at social justice issues often shares this view of learners as capable of resisting dominant discourses, as teachers instruct learners to identify sexist, racist, and class-biased media messages, and to create media to counter such representations (Kellner and Share, 2005).

Semiotics and media ecology. In the 1960s and 70s, Marshall McLuhan and Roland Barthes established influential models for deconstructing the symbolic power of texts and media channels. Barthes (1968) used concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth to demonstrate how all manner of media texts construct and naturalize meanings. For MLE, his work emphasizes textual analysis to deconstruct ideology, but also facilitates a

focus on the grammar of media languages. Some of McLuhan's ideas may encourage MLE with a tool or tech skill focus. But the example of his pedagogy based on the idea that we learn to manage and direct symbolic environments by inquiry (McLuhan 1964), models the student-centered media inquiry of form, content and context, which is shared across many strands of MLE.

Reception studies and the powerful audience. In the 1980s, ethnographic research on the practices of media consumers in interpretive communities challenged the notion of the dominated audience, celebrating the diverse uses, pleasures and meanings that consumers made of media (Radway 1984; Ang 1985). For Jenkins (1992), media fandom is an alternative space for cultural nomads to play with identities, but also to rethink gender, sexuality, race, and so on. Notions of the powerful audience resonate with media literacy approaches promoting an acquisition model of learning by building from students' existing knowledge & interest (Tyner 1998). Such approaches recognize that the media in learners' lives provide pleasures that are an integral part of the identities in which they invest (Buckingham and Sefton-Greene 1994; Hobbs 2004).

Figure 3: Discourses of Education Reform

Discourses of Education Reform			
	Curricula & Pedagogy	Learning Theory	Implications for Media Literacy
Traditional <i>1980s resurgent</i>	Direct instruction Core subjects Standards, basics Character Ed	Behaviorism (Bandura) Transmission (Skinner; Leavis)	Knowledge focus Bridge to core Tech training Protectionism
Progressive <i>60s-70s dominant</i>	Student-centered Project/inquiry-base Skills over content Values clarification	Constructivism (Bruner, Vygotsky) Multi-Intelligences (Gardner)	Student voice focus Reflective practice Analysis/production Civic engagement
Critical <i>1980s alternative</i>	Read the World Local culture focus Awareness-analysis- reflection-action	(Multi)Cultural Ed Group Oriented Empowerment (Freire)	Demystify ideology Make indie media Address local issues Act upon injustice

Discourses of education reform. To understand the development of media literacy concepts in *Media&Values*, we must also be sensitive to how the editor and contributors negotiated or neglected the prominent educational discourses around teachers, learners, and schooling.

Here, I've created a chart (see Figure 3) to summarize the curricula, pedagogy, & learning theories of these prominent approaches in education with their implications for media literacy. [See Figure 3: Discourses of Education Reform, on the following page]. In the 1980s, the *Nation at Risk* policies of back-to-basics standardization favored direct instruction of traditional core subjects (Ravitch 2000), underpinned by transmission theories of teaching and learning the finest values of our culture through behavior models (Bandura 1977; Skinner 1968), which implicated a knowledge focus in media literacy with MLE as a bridge to core subjects (Hobbs 2004), while facilitating tech training and protectionist approaches (Potter 2004). Despite the policy driven focus on traditional approaches, progressive pedagogy remained influential for teachers and teacher educators who valued student-centered, project-based curricula

(Ravitch 2000), developing skills over content in experiential learning underpinned by constructivist theories (Bruner 1960, 1973; Dewey 1938; Vygotsky 1978), which support student voice, reflective practice, a balance of analysis and production and civic engagement in MLE (Buckingham 2003; Hobbs 2008). And finally Freire's ideas about empowerment through critical pedagogy provided an alternative approach (Freire 1970; Giroux 2001), which aligned with media literacy looking to demystify ideology, and act on local issues and injustice (Kellner and Share 2005; Lewis and Jhally 1998).

Historical actors and institutional history.

We must also consider identities and intentions of Thoman as well as the staff and board of the magazine in relation to its institutional backers, at first support from numerous Catholic religious organizations and communities, and after 1983, the Media Action Research Center, a multi-denominational group active in national media education since the early 70s. The magazine began with a grant from the Lilly Foundation to found the National Sisters Communication Service, a non-profit organization to establish public relation offices

Figure 4: Institutional History of *Media&Values* Magazine

Institutional History of M&V

Year	Target Audiences	Publishing/ Institution	Key Contributors	Notes
1977	Catholic communicators & educators (nuns)	National Sisters Communications Service (NSCS)	Sr. E. Thoman, CHM Sr. S. Koritnik, SCL	Comm. as ministry; issues & practical tips
1983	Religious thought leaders, activists, religious educators	Media Action Research Center (MARC)	Sr. E. Thoman, CHM Rosalind Silver, columnists, staff	Magazine as educ. resource; themed issues
1989	Thought leaders, activists, non-formal educators	Center for Media & Values (non-profit, inc.)	Sr. E. Thoman, CHM Rosalind Silver, Jay Davis, staff	Magazine as curricula; ML workshop kits
1993	Educators: formal, public & parochial; non-formal	Center for Media Literacy	End of M&V magazine	Curricular & Membership publication

to counter stereotypes of nuns in news and entertainment. It was basically a newsletter from Thoman and a small staff to help inform Church leaders about media issues and offer practical advice for congregational communications offices. This effort was an attempt to promote a communications ministry in the Catholic Church, within which, Thoman included media literacy education, then called media awareness, as an important component. So as the first nameplate declares, the magazine offered “a quarterly look at Modern Communication and its Impact on Religious Values” with critical views of the influences of television and new computer technologies on society, and calls for media education in youth and parent groups, alongside tips on newsletter layout, bulletin board design, office management, and using new telephone conference call technology. So, very heady and very practical.

In 1983, the Center for Communication Ministry closed and the magazine was bought by MARC, the Media Action Research Center, an ecumenical group with diverse Protestant communication leaders, which had built an extensive national network of certified media educators

beginning in the early 1970s with its Television-Awareness-Training, or T-A-T. So, their rolodex expanded the magazine audience to religious thought leaders of many faiths, and shifted away from serving religious PR offices in order to provide resources for activists and media educators in the MARC network. By the mid 1980’s this was no longer a 12 page newsletter, but a 16-24 page, typeset, 2-color magazine with a consistent design and a growing group of columnists, a large board of directors, and even a few staff members and interns. Circulation doubled and tripled, reaching a regular print run around 10,000 by 1989 when *Media&Values* became independent, incorporating as the non-profit Center for Media and Values, and using a grant from the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to hire an educational director, Jay Davis. The magazine shifted from being an educational resource, to being curricula for use by media educators in non-formal settings. For example, the two gender themed issues, “Men, Myth, and Media” and “Redesigning Women” (vols. 48-49, 1990), became the *Media Literacy Workshop Kit* of lesson plans called *Break the Lies that Bind: Sexism in the Media*.

And here is what's so amazing about the Elizabeth Thoman Media Literacy Archive for my research. If I was wondering about the validity of my reading of the target audience from the magazine, in the archive I find minutes of board meetings, budgets, grants, planning documents, and best of all, candid editorial correspondences—thousands of them!—like the one shown in Figure 5, where Thoman reaches out to Scottish media education guru Eddie Dick for feedback on the transition to independent publishing as the Center for Media and Values (Thoman 1990).

Here is a verification of the target audience from behind the curtain as fellow advocates and resource publishers reveal their vulnerability and rationale for choices. The prospect of access to a wealth of such primary documents is quite thrilling for a historical researcher.

And in 1993, there was another name change to the Center for Media Literacy, and the end of *Media&Values* magazine, as CML transitioned into a membership organization focused on curriculum development, teacher training and media literacy education advocacy, venturing into formal education

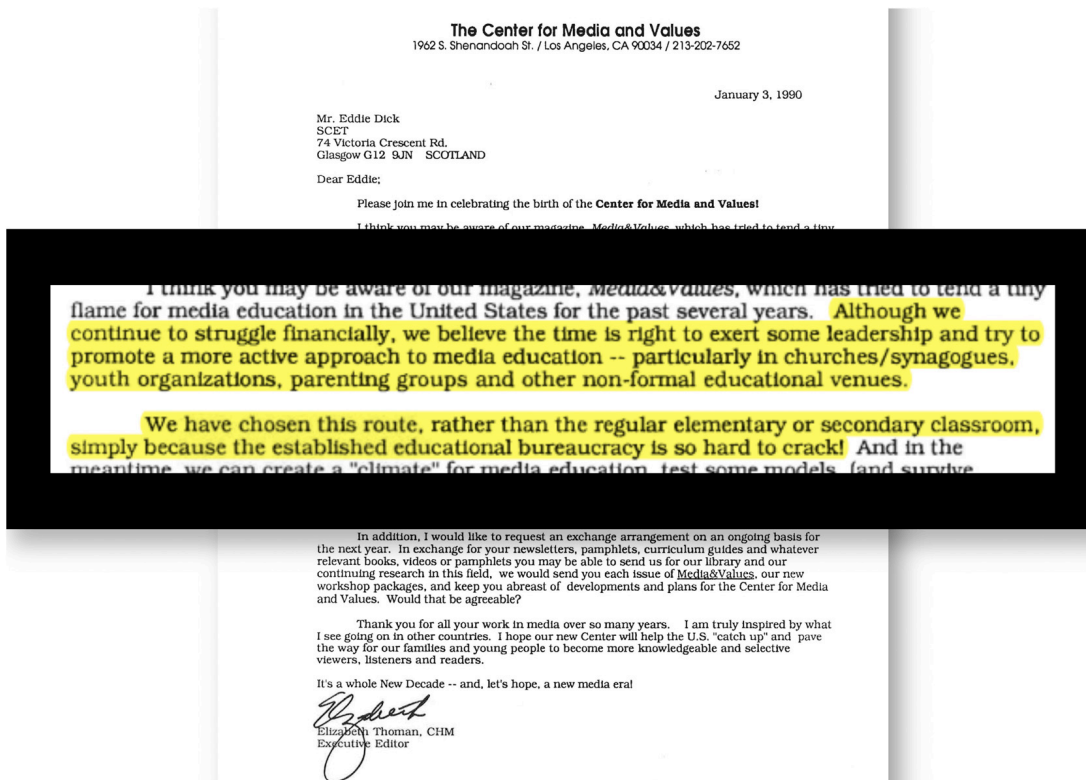
settings as a leader in the field for the next decade and beyond.

Discourses in the public sphere. Finally, we must also keep in mind how discourses of the public sphere may have contributed to developing media literacy education discourses through popular culture, various crises, politics, and the many changes in media tech, industry and policy through the period. So there's our context. Now what did I turn up with all my digging in *Media&Values* magazine and the archives.

Findings

My findings shape up into three chapters around major themes of the magazine positioning media literacy as a means for media reform, health and social justice, as understanding representation and reality, and as pedagogy, or approaches to teaching and learning. To give you a feel of what the magazine looked and sounded like, I am going to do a deep dive into the first theme, which I think has an especially interesting arc of development to lend perspective for current MLE practice. Then, we'll touch on key points of my analysis for the other two.

Figure 5: Letter from Elizabeth Thoman to Eddie Dick



Media literacy as reform. Discourses of media effects, critical views of media's political economy, and a liberal-Catholic sense of social justice frame *Media&Values'* construction of media literacy as reform. Every magazine issue offered some sort of way to get involved—to give feedback to media industries, to support broadcasting regulations, to use mass media to voice your displaced opinions and values, or to address issues of media violence, alcohol and tobacco promotion, commercial exploitation of kids, access gaps between haves and have-nots, cultural imperialism, and representation in news. These issues are still pertinent today, as now we see media educators and learners getting involved in reform of Internet behavior with cyberbullying, digital regulation with copyright and piracy issues, and the persistent issues of access with the digital divide.

The magazine develops this concept of media literacy as reform, first, by problematizing media as a violent disruption in people's lives, displacing socialization by traditional institutions, and disrupting personal relationships, which are the most prominent themes throughout the publication run. Just to give you a sense of the frequency that I found these ideas in my discourse analysis, here are some stats of the number of recurrences of these themes:

- *Media overwhelm people* : recurs in 58 articles in 29 issues of M&V in 16 of 16 years
- *Media displace traditional values*: recurs in 67 articles in 26 issues of M&V in 14 of 16 years
- *Media disrupt social relationships* : recurs in 30 articles in 20 issues of M&V in 12 of 16 years

I believe this is the sort of thing Foucault means by repetition of discursive statements in the archive accruing into concepts with implications for identities and power. But more importantly than the numbers, let me give you an impression of how these themes looked and sounded in the magazine.

Media overwhelm people. In her first feature editorial in the inaugural issue in 1977, *I Hate It, But I love It*, Thoman asks rhetorically of television, "What is this thing that has intruded itself so totally on our society in less than a lifetime?" (Thoman 1977, 5). Her descriptions of communication technologies as having "mushroomed" and

"revolutionized our world" as an "explosion that is profoundly rattling humankind" (6) resound throughout the run of the magazine in both staff columns and contributors' articles. The accumulation of such word choices establishes the magazine's construction of the extensive power of media over people, reinforcing editors' explicit claims that "The telecommunications age has the power to transform us and everything we know" (Koritnik, 1982, 4). And leads to the claim, "The first step [towards media literacy] is learning to stop taking media's presence for granted and recognizing the flood of media that inundates our lives" (Silver 1992, 3).

Media displace traditional values. Media disrupt social relationships. The most common positioning of the concepts of media representations, media technologies, and media uses in the magazine is as *displacing traditional values*. A 1978 NSCS board statement portrays media as a home invader: "No household needs masked bandits in the living room, robbing us of our values unawares" (Staff 1978, 8). In the early years of the magazine, when the audience was mostly religious communications professionals, it was common for *Media&Values* writers to specify religious values and authority as displaced or challenged by media, as exemplified in Thoman's first editorial, "Common values seem to be no longer established by the Ten Commandments, but by hundreds of thousands of TV commercials" (Thoman 1977, 4). However, as the magazine audience became more broadly ecumenical, the talk of specific religious values gave way to references to shared human values of compassion, care, freedom and fairness, with their flip sides opposing violence, discrimination, and exploitation. The rhetoric in the magazine shifted to highlight the *phenomenon* of values displacement, and the offending values of media, more than it specified the particular traditional values of readers, which had many variations across the diverse readership.

An article attributed to influential media effects researcher, George Gerbner, appearing in 1981, and reprinted twice in 1987 and 1992, states: "Television is the central cultural instrument whose historical predecessor is not print or even radio, but pre-print religion. Television is that ritual myth-builder--totally involving, compelling, and institutionalizing as the mainstream of the

socializing process” (Gerbner 1981, 2). Authorities on mass media and culture from diverse backgrounds, such as media historian Michael Schudson (1986), cultural studies media scholar Sut Jhally (Silver 1992b), and feminist media activist Jean Kilbourne (1989), all repeat the notion that *media displace traditional values* in the pages of the magazine using cultural critique with arguments illustrated by poignant contemporary and historical examples. Thus, the notion is supported by media studies discourses from both media effects and critical cultural studies, although in different ways. This theme also finds articulation in the voices of parents, youth workers, minority advocates, pastors and teachers in staff columns, creating an aura of consensus about the idea.

For the double issue 52/53 titled *Children and Television: Growing Up in a Media World*, in her closing editorial, *Media Literacy: Agenda for the 90s*, Elizabeth Thoman revisits her theme of love/hate relationship with media, extending the scope of TV displacing values, to all communications: “While we all recognize the many benefits to society resulting from today’s instant global communications, we are also aware of the challenges it has brought to parental authority, to family relationships and especially to the established value structure that was installed for centuries by the home working in tandem with the school and the church or synagogue. But those days are gone. And the challenge for families, school and all community institutions today is to prepare young people for living in a world of powerful images, words and sounds.” (1990/1991, 32)

Thus, media literacy is positioned as a means for meeting the challenge to counter the values asserted by media in conflict with the values of the media user’s family, community and religion. By constructing the socializing role of media as a problem of values displacement, the magazine seeks to motivate readers to demand change in the media system to align with their desired values.

While alleging these massive cultural shifts on a grand scale to jolt readers into awareness of rapid changes asserted by media, *Media & Values* also depicted many tangible issues that could be addressed with tangible solutions. Repetitive themes in articles constructed problems as:

- Mass media messages impact public health
- Mass media representations teach and reinforce sexism, racism and fear
- Media industries perpetuate discrimination
- Commercial media promote materialism and fail to serve public interests
- U.S. media engages in cultural imperialism

Reflection columns, activist profiles, and resource listings suggested solutions through taking action for institutional change, including, calling for improved ratings systems for cable TV, movies and video rentals, boycotting producers of sexually violent media, and supporting legislation framing media violence as a health issue and not a matter of free speech. The magazine suggested writing and calling media outlets to demand better representations in news and entertainment, supporting affirmative action efforts in media industry, promoting third world media development, and sharing resources for people with disabilities. There were repeated calls for contacting your representatives in Congress to advocate for public interest broadcast requirements (e.g., in the rewrites of the Communication Act of 1938), to limit corporate media mergers in telecommunications, and to ensure public access for community media in local cable television deals. Likewise, the magazine backed the efforts of Peggy Charren and the Action for Children’s Television advocacy group to require broadcasters to produce educational shows with limited commercial messages, which met with some success in the Children’s Television Act of 1990. However, the success of that act was the exception to the rule in the 1980s when extensive deregulation unfolded under the FCC of Reagan and Bush administrations. This seems to have been a factor in *Media & Values* turning to more solutions based on individual change through media education towards the end of the publication run in the late 80’s and early nineties—more on that in a moment.

By first jolting readers into awareness by alleging these massive cultural shifts, then depicting tangible issues with tangible solutions suggested by the efforts of media reformers, social activists, and concerned citizens whom readers were encouraged to emulate, the magazine constructs a narrative of transformation for its readers from victims of malign media influence to crusaders for media reform,

social justice and public health, all achieved through media literacy. Within this narrative, *Media&Values*, and in particular its creator Elizabeth Thoman, struggles to negotiate the tensions around engaging the media industry in media literacy efforts to remedy issues in which media themselves are implicated as major perpetrators of injustice and harm. *Media&Values* walked a line of pitting readers against mass media makers for neglecting public interests while suggesting the great potential of collaboration with big media to affect positive change. But Thoman's identity was grounded in the idea of grass roots social justice reform, reinforced by her religious community, which eventually found its primary target in supporting parents and educators in developing media literacy to meet their own needs—to monitor and regulate youth media use, to engage youth in reform, and to lead values clarification and critical thinking to distinguish family and community values from the rampant commercialism and exploitation in mass media. While the magazine did continue until the end of its run to include resources and articles to help readers join efforts for institutional change, the focus shifted in the final four years from social movements to personal issues, as the magazine itself became a curriculum resource.

At the end of the 1980s, [in *Media&Values*] there is a clear move away from positioning the media literate citizen as addressing policy and institutions, to emphasizing media literacy for personal change, in the home and very local settings. This is still promoted as social reform, with the idea that personal change might “trickle up” into changing media and other oppressive institutions. In 1993, we see an article suggesting twenty solutions to the youth violence issue (Dover 1993), which the CDC had just officially declared an epidemic following the L.A. riots after the Rodney King verdict. All of these solutions are basically media literacy education activities for schools, homes, and community groups, and only two of the twenty involve addressing institutions.

So, have we given up on media reform, social justice and public health in media literacy education today? Hardly. A community of practitioners still carries on the *Media&Values* tradition of taking on unfair practices of big media companies (e.g., “Latinos for Internet Freedom,” Media Literacy

Project 2012). Likewise, there is still plenty of work in the media and public health strand in developing media literacy to mitigate harmful media effects (e.g., Drug Free Pennsylvania 2013). But these efforts mostly focus on individual skills and seldom promote the activism to change media policy and industry directly that *Media&Values* supported, especially early on, as a civic responsibility. Well, market forces rule our media landscape today, you might say; *M&V* learned its lesson and so have we—best to help the people directly than try to control the system and take on institutional power of corporate and government agencies.

But against the backdrop of *Media&Values*' problematizing of mass media industry practices and representations, today it seems that corporations are doing the problematizing, and are trying to reform the widespread practices of media users for corporate interests. Just look at intellectual property and copyright issues where, literally “sharing” has been cast as piracy (Holson 2003; Green 2012). Big media have cast an entire generation of cultural practice as criminal. Media literacy education has responded, articulating the fair use norms of our community of practice, winning the right for media educators to circumvent Digital Rights Management, and ultimately engaging youth in considering issues of copyrights and fair use (Center for Social Media 2013; Hobbs 2011c). But even this approach to educating about fair use, though useful in exercising critical thinking and personal rights, does not position learners to address the institutions who can litigate and legislate our rights out of existence. Seeing the early connections in media literacy history to social reform through grassroots activism confronting institutions makes the absence of that connection today all the more conspicuous—especially when we see that civic action on the Internet has affected public policy, like on January 18, 2012 when many websites went dark to protest piracy regulations in SOPA and PIPA legislation (Hsu & Chang 2012). Should we connect media literacy practice today with activism for institutional and media reform? The history of media literacy in *Media&Values* raises the question and provides precedents and contrasting contexts for debate. Let's briefly look at my other findings.

Media literacy as understanding representation and reality. Critical cultural studies, semiotics and media ecology discourses frame *Media&Values*' constant focus on deconstructing stereotypes, unmasking industry interests and exclusions, demystifying ideological notions of race, gender, age, and class, and analyzing the bias in news. These approaches are still the meat and potatoes of most media literacy education in formal settings today, but looking back at the historical context of a mostly top-down, one-way mass media era lends us perspective on the new challenges of learning how we and our students may reproduce ideology and distort reality in our online media participation.

The magazine devoted more pages for feature articles to expert analyses of ideology and stereotypes than any other topic. Thinking about how many of these articles and issues became the basis for discussion and workshop groups in the mid-1980s, and in classrooms of the early 1990s, makes it clear that, despite the critical perspective, the magazine's pedagogy is very traditional around these issues; it is based on sharing and discussing expert knowledge about how media limits identities and perpetuates injustice. It is telling that *Media&Values* curricula in the *Media Literacy Workshop Kits* on these themes seldom include production activities. It also calls attention to the absence of youth media production work and pedagogy in *Media&Values*.² This gives us some historical perspective on our current choices as media literacy educators between sharing knowledge as experts and facilitating a process of discovery.

Media&Values also featured expert analysis on how news constructs reality. In several special issues on news, the magazine reiterated the concept that bias is inevitable, and became a forum for

discussing the tension between journalist ethics and the constraints on news production imposed by the medium, money, time, knowledge, identity and experience—all within issues of media ownership, politics and government sources. Part of being media literate, then, meant seeking diverse sources and supporting alternative media.

Media&Values constructed media literacy as understanding representation and reality in the face of a mass media system with four major TV networks, one cable news outlet, and a few leading newspapers—whose clear dominance in constructing reality prompted the magazine's constant call to recognize bias as inevitable and to seek alternative media to round out your worldview. Since then, the media landscape for news has changed significantly with the constant news cycle, social media, and the ability of anyone with a mobile and a twitter following to make news. From the perspective of this historical contrast, we see current news literacy approaches and their contexts more clearly. The Stoney Brook approach champions J-school notions of journalism ethics in making and evaluating news according to principles of fairness, accuracy, and thoroughness in representation, which quality news outlets may provide in contrast to the chaos of the blogosphere and social media (Center for News Literacy 2013). The emphasis on inevitable bias is not as prominent as the focus on skills in recognizing high quality, ethical journalism. Conversely, a global approach to citizenship in news literacy, tends to value the diversity of voices in digital media (Mihailidis 2011). With biases acknowledged, learners see themselves as newsmakers with civic responsibility to create and evaluate trustworthiness of information in new ways in news they produce and consume from a variety of big and small sources. This tension between these news literacy approaches is really about power and trust in handling information, which also has implications for information literacy. However, the decades of work in information literacy before and during *Media&Values* publication run is almost entirely absent from the magazine. Since there is no evidence in the magazine or archive on this omission beyond the gap, I'll leave you to ponder that disconnect in the field from way back then, and invite you to consider why disconnects persist between information literacy and other strands of media

² At the time, a strong tradition of youth media existed in student journalism and emerged in public access television through the expansion of cable TV. While non-linear editing stations were prohibitively expensive for most educational settings in the 1980s, home video equipment was available and used in various formal and informal learning settings. My dissertation discusses how *M&V* editors eschewed a production focus in part as an attempt to distinguish its critical and constructivist approaches from professional apprenticeship pedagogy in college media studies programs.

literacy practice. So, let's turn to my final theme of media literacy as pedagogy.

Media literacy as pedagogy. The feature articles in *Media&Values* that sought to raise awareness and model analysis of media were routinely followed by informal reflective pieces by columnists connecting media issues to their everyday lives and identities as parents, youth educators, religious leaders, minorities and so on. With reflection columns came articles on taking action for media reform or doing media literacy lessons. Thus, the magazine itself assumed the role of first developing the reader's own media literacy, by adapting Freire's process of critical pedagogy (Freire 1970; Thoman 1986), also known as the empowerment spiral, to structure the magazine design. [See Figure 6: Magazine Structured by Empowerment Spiral]. The article, "Blueprint for Response-Ability," in 1986, articulated Thoman's vision for applying Freire's model of social analysis to media experience. A version of this article, was reprinted a half dozen times, explicitly detailing how the magazine was organized according to this process. However, it was not until the 1990s that

Media&Values began developing more sophisticated ways to discuss and model teaching and learning of media literacy.

After Jay Davis was hired as educational director in 1989, the newly formed Center for Media and Values began to package *Media&Values* issues with a book of lesson plans and curriculum materials for school settings known as *Media Literacy Workshop Kits*. The magazine itself, for the first time, actually began discussing and suggesting pedagogy regularly. For the final four years, the last page of the magazine featured a pullout with a media literacy activity or learning resource for use in classrooms and group settings. One of these resource pages showcased the debut of the core concepts of media literacy, for the first time, in issue 57, in 1992 (Davis 1992). For the first time in the U.S., that is. Of course, these core concepts had already appeared in Canada, where the Association for Media Literacy had been using these and a few more—8 core concepts altogether--in mandated school curriculum for a few years prior, and those had been adapted from Len Masterman's 18 key concepts—and, ever true to their ethic of transparency, this intellectual

Figure 6: Magazine as structured by the empowerment spiral.



lineage was traced in a section from the *Media Literacy Workshop Kits* called “Credit Where It’s Due” acknowledging these scholars and many more. So, around four of these core concepts, Davis designed the lessons in the *Media Literacy Workshop Kits* as a synthesis of an inquiry approach to learning informed by progressive pedagogy and the social analysis spiral of Freire that Thoman had applied to her magazine design as a model for readers for years. The magazine, in the kits, provided texts to consider, and still modeled deep analysis of ideology and political economy. But we also saw a shift towards honoring student’s identities and pleasures in the media they knew and loved. The synthesis of Thoman’s media experience empowerment spiral with Davis’s inquiry-driven curriculum design, moving towards student-centered lessons in the *Media Literacy Workshop Kits*, was a major contribution to the field of media literacy. Here [in Figure 7, below], side-by-side, I show examples from the kits that model the classic, expert cultural studies

and semiotics style analysis of media techniques and political economy, very much a traditional pedagogy, alongside simulation and production activities that allow the learner to play with media concepts and express their own interests and existing knowledge. Where have I felt this tension before? Ah, yes, in the tension between critical media literacy and digital media & learning strands of MLE practice. Critical approaches often impose particular ways of knowing and thinking that allow learners to de-center, to occupy particular identity positions outside of the status quo in order to see problems and enact change for social justice—and that’s still at the core of the field of media literacy today. At the vanguard, are educators who emphasize play and engagement in digital environments as means to participate in digital cultures. In part, this strand grew out of the new literacies movement in education, developing at the end of the 90s, which sought to explode the concept of a centralized,

Figure 7: A side-by-side comparison of lessons with contrasting pedagogies from *Media Literacy Workshop Kits*

Examples from Media Literacy Workshop Kits, “Selling Addiction” (1992) & “News for the 90s” (1991)

#1 HOW ADVERTISERS SELL ADDICTION

How Advertisers Sell Addiction

Problem drinkers and young people are the primary targets of many alcohol advertisements. Young people are also the primary targets of many cigarette advertisements. In fact, “legal drug” advertising is most effective when it targets specific demographic groups—like young blacks and “vixen white females”—two groups targeted by recent new brands Uptown and Dakota.

The photographs below illustrate some of the more common techniques used to sell addiction and suggest why the ads are so deceptive. Included are techniques which deliberately contradict known facts about the use and effect of these products.

Drinking Regularly is a Normal Part of Life.

In “Scoresby Scotch the Secret’s Out” we see why many experts say that alcohol ads target problem drinkers (once 25 percent of all drinkers drink 80 percent of all alcohol). Here we see two cartoon characters about to engage in a romantic interlude. Having a drink is introduced as a natural element of the evening—even a natural element of being at home. “So much to do... Oh, let’s just stay home and... have a drink!”

Similarly, the giant sand-castle Chivas bottle is blown up to bigger-than-life size and becomes something that “men dream of”—as if this were a common dream for anyone except problem drinkers.

Smoking Cigarettes is Clean and Safe

The Benson & Hedges advertisement does something a little more subtle but just as powerful. Here is a woman in a pristine bathroom. She and the bathroom are clean and pure. To symbolize this, she is even wrapped in a white sheet. Yet she’s smoking a cigarette. The implicit message is clear. Benson & Hedges are so clean and pure they won’t clog your lungs or increase your risk of heart attack or cancer or muddy you or your image.

Targeting Youth

Beer and cigarette advertisements target youth but remain acceptable because they don’t actually show children or underage youth using their products. Instead, they show the first legal age group beyond teenagers—college students and young adults. These advertising images appeal to teenagers in particular because teens want to imitate college-age adults and advertisers know it: “Get some air MacKenzie—the original party animal.”

#6 DESIGNING A MEDIA CAMPAIGN

	TV NEWS	TALK-SHOWS	TV-ADDS	P.S.-AS	RADIO SHOWS	PAPERS
AUDIENCE						
COST						
CHARACTER						

Designing a Media Campaign

YOU ARE THE PRODUCER

As the Producer of the local newscast *Your World in 22 Minutes*, you must exercise “news judgment” and select from many possible stories. Your decisions will be based on:

- The importance of the story - Does it involve significant conflict or signal pending change?
- Will it hold your audience’s interest? Does it affect their lives or tap their interests? Will it move them?
- Timeline. Do you need to run the story today or will the story keep?

- Balance. Leaven the bad news with good news.
- The quality of the pictures.

Order the stories and limit yourself to 21:25 minutes (the length of a standard commercial news broadcast). Don’t forget: Your first (“lead”) story should be the one that’s most newsworthy and will keep your audience from tuning in the competition.

[Please note that these sample news stories are unusually long for the purpose of the exercise. Most news stories rarely last more than two minutes and are often as short as 15 seconds.]



capital L literacy, asserting a hyper-contextualized sense of plural literacies—particular skills and knowledge we acquire to communicate in particular contexts—not one set of that transfers across many places (New London Group 2000). This was a different way of looking at power, a radical attempt to honor students' identities, which could be seen as a challenge to the centralized, top down notion of a preferred, single Literacy that all citizens should acquire. *Media&Values* gives us an example of both practices side by side. I wonder if we can't have it both ways. To do this, we need more dialogue about how power works differently in our practices. Historical analysis provides perspective for this dialogue, that I hope might move teacher education and common best practices towards ensuring learners the opportunity to experience the benefits of a range of approaches to media literacy education.

Each of these themes constructs media literacy as an intervention in power, but at different conceptual levels—addressing institutions and political power with reform efforts; demystifying ideological power in understanding representation and reality; and negotiating personal and social identities through media literacy pedagogy. The historical example of *Media&Values* constructing ML as interventions in power gives us perspectives on how we may use and fail to use media literacy as an intervention in power today. Should media literacy practice aim to address institutions and work for institutional change; or should it focus on reform for individuals and small groups, in the home and within the learning community? What contexts of our own practices shape our answers to that question? Are we problematizing media issues as citizens, educators and learners, through our media literacy practice, or are governments and corporations setting the agenda for media issues? What kind of solutions to media literacy issues do we offer? How do we develop practices that can recognize ideological issues while honoring student identities and pleasures? It's an old question.

The *Media&Values* focus on deconstructing stereotypes in a mass media entertainment landscape dominated by a few TV networks may appear old fashioned in today's digital landscape where people can create their own identity representations for masses of friends on Facebook pages. But the

historical contrast also highlights the fact that media makers tend to reinforce oppressive ideologies. This calls attention to current practices that neglect what Digital Media & Learning proponent Henry Jenkins referred to as the "ethics challenge" that new media literacies must confront in digital environments (Jenkins et al. 2006). Now that everyone can create media for many to see, perhaps we need to be even more vigilant in teaching and learning about ideology to avoid reproducing limiting stereotypes in our own media production.

As for pedagogy, I am a big tent guy. I think we need to offer learners a range of different ML experiences; not that all teachers must do all things media literacy, but I do believe teacher and librarian education need to offer training in all strands of media literacy education. I have hope that historical work on media education may offer some ways of talking across the many discourse communities in our field, just as *Media&Values* magazine once did in advocating for media literacy education in the United States.

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