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Editor's Introduction

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More than a century ago, educational philosopher John Dewey asserted in *My Pedagogical Creed* his belief that “education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing.”¹ The discipline of media literacy education (MLE) has evolved in recent decades to magnify this pedagogical principle. Regardless of educational setting, MLE has emerged as a process more so than a subject to be taught. A core principle of MLE is to intentionally and systematically cultivate critical thinking among learners of all ages.² In this regard, the process and goal of media literacy education can be thought of as “one and the same thing.” In other words, the focus is not on *what* we teach as media literacy educators as much as it is on *how* we teach it. The articles, essays, and reviews that comprise this issue of the *JMLe* feature classroom teachers, adolescent youth, college students, and researchers as they work to bring the process and goal of media literacy education into one focal point.

The research articles that comprise the first section of this *JMLe* issue explore MLE through a qualitative research lens. Berkowitz (“How the News Media’s Portrayal”) begins the conversation with an exploration of how news portrayals of fanfiction communities shape public expectations and perceptions of teachers who use fanfiction in the classroom. He uses frame analysis and critical discourse analysis methods to identify how *The New York Times* reflects and influences socio-cultural beliefs about fanfiction and fanfiction-based literacies. Berkowitz’s study echoes the MLE core principle that all media are constructions and function as agents of socialization.³ This study finds fanfiction to be situated as a normal adolescent activity, and a powerful tool for media literacy education.

Felt, Vartabedian, Literat, and Mehta (“Explore Locally, Excel Digitally”) study the impact of an after-

school program on high school students’ skill levels in the areas of digital literacy, new media literacy, social and emotional learning, and the ethical thinking inherent in digital citizenship. The researchers situate their investigation within a participatory culture pedagogy and emphasize the skill of “play” as it “encourages risk, challenging teachers to let the classroom become a place where both they and their students feel safe to experiment creatively and fail productively” (215). The researchers conclude that digital citizenship hinges on social and emotional competence and community awareness and offer possibilities for cultivating a participatory culture even within the confines and constraints of formalized schooling.

Ashley, Lyden, and Fasbinder (“Exploring Message Meaning”) study first-year college students’ interpretation and evaluation of different types of media messages (advertising, public relations and news) and note the gap in their baseline knowledge and understanding across different media message formats. The researchers identified the need for media literacy educators to move beyond “superficial components” of media messages and “to complicate students’ media realities by providing information and asking questions that facilitate critical thought rather than merely seeking clear answers” (239).

Jacobs (“Developing Multimodal Academic Literacies”) also engages in qualitative inquiry of first-year college students. Jacobs studies the use of popular and multimedia texts alongside traditional academic texts in a college classroom and finds that “students were able to create multimodal texts that included many of the elements and ways of thinking valued by academic literacies” (254). Jacobs concludes that when taught alongside traditional composition, multimodal academic literacies helped students gain a better understanding of how academic arguments are constructed.

The Voices from the Field section features two essays that linger in the ethical challenges associated with MLE praxis and research. Gibbons (“Developing an Ethics of Youth Media Production”) lingers in the interplay between media literacy, modality, and youth identity. She argues that the discussion of ethics—when applied to youth media production—ought to be more broadly conceived. Gibbons shifts the question from “What are the ethical ways in which youth use media?” to “What are the ethics we have created as media literacy educators within which youth create media?” Gibbons sees the question “as less about envisioning codes of conduct for how young people consume and produce media and more as a question of what is the larger structure that media literacy educators have created culturally and socially that determines the beliefs, practices, and identities as young people create media” (244).

DaCosta provides a firsthand account from the research trenches (“Media Literacy Education Program Evaluators”) and explores the challenges and possibilities of conducting experimental research within a middle school. Consulting with her MLE mentors (Erica Austin and Erica Scharrer), DaCosta laments the challenges of methodological isolation and maintaining research integrity. She astutely observes that MLE program evaluators must “yield scientifically legitimate results in order to suggest changes in practice or policy” yet at the same time catering to the need for “sustained, respectful and reciprocal relationships with our school partners” (267).

Rounding out this issue is a set of four incisive reviews assembled by Paul Mihailidis, our Professional Resource Reviews Editor. The resources vary from print to digital and the topics range from how comedy shapes post-9/11 America to Artbabbble—a collaborative online video platform for art content.

In our continued effort to expand MLE research and praxis across multiple educational constituencies—and to bring both the process and goal of MLE into central focus—we now provide *JMLE* articles in rich multimedia format on namle.net. There you can read and respond to articles, essays, and reviews in html format. Lastly, we extend a warm welcome to *JMLE*'s new editorial assistant, Michelle Thomas, who is pursuing her Master of Arts in English Education at Montclair State University.

Endnotes

1. Dewey, John. 1897. “My Pedagogical Creed.” *School*

Journal vol. 54: 77-802.

2. National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE). 2007. “Core Principles of Media Literacy Education,” <http://namle.net/publications/core-principles/>

3. Ibid.