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Guest Editor's Introduction

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Intersections: Teaching and Learning Across Media

Disruption is a watchword for the time we live in: competing social networking platforms, ever-shifting working styles, and novel job descriptions displacing the old, manifold curricular and performance demands. With all these possibilities vying for our buy-in, it has become vital to seek out commonalities among these trends, to find out where they intersect so that we can begin to discern direction in our culture and shepherd development of our educational system.

Media literacy can take a leading role in this nationwide task. We, as media-savvy educators, now have the chance to articulate how our new pedagogies can bring the landscape into closer connection. We are the leaders who can erect road signs at the intersections where communication practices cross paths. We are the thinkers responsible for generating collaboration and shared meaning within a media revolution well underway and yet incompletely understood by our educational infrastructure.

Why “Across Media”?

As media literacy educators, many of us already use media as the backbone to our teaching. We take our ideas across different media sharing, deconstructing and making meaning across books, movies, and other artifacts that expand upon the story or lesson shared. But often, each media is a representation of only one story and therefore is noted as multimedia.

Unlike multimedia where one story is told across multiple mediums, *transmedia* defined by Henry Jenkins¹ (2006), is a story that “unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole” (95). While it is possible to experience a narrative by interacting with one element of a transmedia story, one must navigate through multiple, interconnected media to decode the entire story. Transmedia stories such as *Wizard of Oz* or *Superman* (both historical stories that continue to

be introduced to new generations) have proven to be engaging and able to motivate ongoing participation among audiences.

Previous research has demonstrated that cross-platform media experiences can support children's learning. For example, recent research on transmedia initiatives sponsored by PBS Ready to Learn has found that children as young as three to five years of age benefit from experiencing educational media content on multiple, linked platforms (Pasnik et al. 2011). Other research has focused on how carefully designed transmedia experiences encourage inquiry and collaboration. For example, *I Love Bees*, described by designer Jane McGonigal (2007)² as an interactive and distributed fiction, invited participants to piece together the backstory of the video game Halo 2. As McGonigal writes, audiences were invited to collaboratively author the story, figuring out clues and contributing to a collective intelligence.

Transmedia needs to be understood as a shift in how culture gets produced and consumed, a different way of organizing the dispersal of media content across media platforms. An exploration of transmedia can begin with transmedia storytelling as defined above, but new logics are being researched and developed, such as transmedia activism with *Kony 2012* or transmedia performance through *Glee*. Creators are pushing the boundaries to explore the richness of mixing old and new media, as well as combining no, low, and high tech interactions that encourage society to share in the cultural production process of sense and meaning making.

Why “Teaching and Learning”?

As we think about transmedia in the classroom, there are several key justifications/motivations for integrating it into our learning and teaching practices. First, as modes of human expression expand and diversify, then the language arts curriculum has to broaden to train students for these new forms of reading and writing.

If many stories are going to become transmedia, then we need to talk with our students about what it means to read a transmedia story and as importantly what it means to conceive and write a transmedia story. This is closely related to what Gunther Kress talks about in terms of multimodality and multiliteracy. Kress argues that we need to teach students the affordances of different media through which we can communicate information and help them to foster the rhetorical skills they need to effectively convey what they want to say across those different platforms.

As educators, we need to model the effective use of different media platforms in the classroom, a practice that would support what Howard Gardner has told us about multi-intelligences. Different students learn better through different modes of communications and thus the lesson is most effective when conveyed through more than one mode of expression. We can reinforce through visuals or activities what we communicate through spoken words or written texts. Doing so effectively pushes us to think about how multiple platforms of communication might re-enforce what we do through our classrooms.

Being at the intersections of this new paradigm shift that affords new practices for media learning has particular potential to help improve serious gaps in educational achievement because of the immersive, interconnected, and dynamic narratives it facilitates. In addition to keeping students engaged, these complex narratives offer rich opportunities for students to participate in active, inquiry-based learning. Transmedia engages multiple literacies, including textual, visual, and media literacies, as well as multiple intelligences. It is highly engaging and allows for important social sharing among collaborators. The non-linear nature of transmedia narratives shares characteristics with spiral curriculum, in which instruction loops back to concepts multiple times to facilitate different connections.

Going Forward Together

This special issue of JMLE aligns closely with NAMLE's July 2013 conference, *Intersections: Teaching and Learning Across Media*³. We strongly encourage anyone attending the conference to read this as a signpost to the programming that awaits you during the two days we will share together. As guest editor of this JMLE special issue, I invited these authors to participate. The three publications share concrete examples of how to extend our teaching and learning from multimedia to transmedia.

I am fortunate to have had the pleasure of collaborating closely with researchers Rebecca Herr-Stephenson, Meryl Alper, and Henry Jenkins over the past two years as we brought together an interdisciplinary team of researchers, media artists, and educators to explore play as a new logic of transmedia. This special issue opens with Becky and Meryl's article, *Transmedia Play: Literacy Across Media*, and offers a good introductory essay outlining the history of transmedia, how it applies to learning, and examples to support the new logic, transmedia play.

Bridging nicely into the K-12 education sector and giving voice to library media specialists, Laura Fleming shares with us *Expanding Learning Opportunities with Transmedia Practices: Inanimate Alice as an Exemplar*. This article provides a concrete example of how transmedia practices can effectively be moved into teaching and learning.

And rounding out the trilogy, Steve Anderson and Holly Willis share with us *Speculative Design and Curriculum Development*, which expounds on the idea of "world building," a key characteristic of transmedia learning especially when disrupting the actual foundation of how teaching and learning happens within higher education to support a more participatory learning environment.

I hope you enjoy these articles that, to me, are vital conversations to nurture. Through mediated construction of meaning, exchanges are now possible with the intersections that have arisen among cultures in our nation. A thorough understanding of how to practice creativity across media can unify the broad demographics of our country, bridging gaps—whether social, cultural, or economical—that have proven resistant to traditional models of education. Disciplines of thought and practice can merge to form innovative perspectives, refreshing the way we approach problems and generating paths of study relevant to twenty-first century careers, citizens, relationships, and lifestyles.

Notes

1. Jenkins, Henry. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.
2. McGonigal, Jane. 2007. *Why I Love Bees: A Case Study in Collective Intelligence Gaming*. http://www.avantgame.com/McGonigal_WhyILoveBees_Feb2007.pdf
3. <http://2013.namle.net>