

## **Critical Media Literacy-A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skill**

Guest Editor: Guofang Wan, Ohio University, USA

Over the past years, the evolution of electronic media has profoundly transformed the ways that young people entertain, learn, communicate and get connected to the world everyday. Computers, Internet, cell phones, which were rarities only a generation ago, become daily tools of communication, information, and amusement for a majority of young people. They spend average of 7:38 hours daily on media, which is almost the amount of time most adults spend at work each day, except that young people use media seven days a week instead of five (Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010). Over 80 percent of kindergarteners use computers and over 50 percent of children under age 9 use the Internet (NCTE, 2007).

The easy access to media and the heavy media use by young people have caused increasing concerns among parents, policymakers, educators and researchers about the potential positive and negative impacts on children and youth. Issues surrounding youth's heavy media use include social development, health and safety, online plagiarism, bullying, sexual predation, vanishing ethnic cultures, effects of media on education, digital divide, generation gaps, globalizations, family relationships, effects of advertising on children, and many more. As multimedia are here to stay, adults need to decide whether it is better to educate or legislate. The perspective we take in this special issue of *New Horizons* is media literacy education.

There would not be such an urgent need for media literacy education for young people if the media we use on a daily basis simply reflected reality, were neutral, value free and safe. In fact, all the media messages that we come in contact with contain

information about values, beliefs, and behaviors and are shaped by economic factors (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1989). “If students are to use new media to their own greatest advantage, they too must learn to creatively and critically browse, research, organize, select, and produce communication forms that use the full spectrum of literacy tools available to them” (Tyner, 2003, p.374). Also research indicates that effective instructions in 21st-century literacies help students understand how to access, evaluate, synthesize, and contribute to information (NCTE, 2007).

In addition, as new media are changing the ways that teaching and learning have been done for centuries schools can not operate as if the only way to teach is through traditional classroom instruction. Thus, becoming literate in the new century means that both teachers and students need to understand the influence of media on our society, develop strategies to critically analyze media, become independent from the influence of media, and open up their minds to embrace and experiment with new tools of teaching and learning provided by the information age. No child’s education is complete without media literacy education and the 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy skills.

This special issue dedicated to media literacy education has assembled contributions from well-published leading researchers in media literacy studies. They bring their years of research, expertise, belief and passion for media literacy education to the reader of *New Horizons in Education*. Topics addressed in this issue include media literacy education as a field of study; impact of heavy use of media on children; ideas that parents, teachers and administrators may use to help children become mature and critical users of media; prevention of cyber bullying; effective integration of media literacy education in content instruction, i.e. through graphic novels, virtual classroom, social

network and socioscientific issues. As the impact of media use is a global phenomenon, the special issue presents readers with perspectives from Europe, to American and to Asia. Authors ask and answer questions related but not limited to Thoman's (1995) outline: (a) Becoming aware of the importance of making choices and managing the amount of time spent with television, videos, electronic games, films and various print media forms; (b) Learning specific skills of critical viewing and surfing – learning to analyze and question what is in the frame/on the screen, how it is constructed, and what may have been left out; (c) Exploring deeper issues of who produces the media we experience and for what purposes. The two book reviews recommend instructional materials for teachers to use in the classroom and for parents to use at home to teach children media literacy.

As the guest editor, I hope this issue will generate further discussion and action among educators, policymakers and researchers on media literacy education worldwide. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the Southeast Asian Studies Program at Ohio University for its assistance/support during the editing process. I also wish to thank the authors for their contribution and the many reviewers who generously offered their time and expertise reviewing the manuscripts.

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