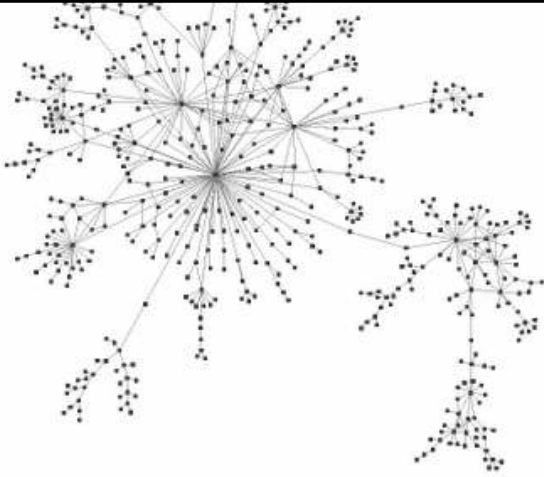


What are 21st Century Literacies?



21st Century Literacies are a new set of competencies which will need to be mastered for an individual to successfully meet the challenges of our rapidly evolving global culture.

For the last couple of decades, as a society we have been focusing largely on technical skills: mastering new technologies, new software, and integrating new learning tools into our homes, workplaces, and schools. The primary educational concern has been access to technology. The discussion has largely been focused on the “Technology Gap”—making sure that all children have access to technology regardless of socio-economic background.

We are still in a period of rapid development of platforms and devices. What we use now will not be the same as what we will be using a few years from now. Although the “Technology Gap” and access to services is still a concern, particularly in rural areas, the cost of technology is coming down, and high-speed internet is fast becoming the norm. The new area of concern is going to be the “Thinking Gap.”

Looking ahead we need to move beyond mastering technology skills to mastering new Literacies. These Literacies are defined as **knowing how to use skills (both traditional and new) within a social (and connected) context.**



Not good: Technology isolation



Better: Technology with socialization



Best: Technology as a path to connected community

Students at P.S. 119 Amersfort School of Social Awareness

[Magnet School of Global & Ethical Studies] in Brooklyn, NY

Skype with their counterparts in Holland.

<http://blog.ps119amersfort.com/>

I take my definition of these Literacies from Howard Rheingold¹, Professor of Social Media studies and Digital Journalism at Stanford University and U.C. Berkeley, and the author of the 2002 book *Smart Mobs*. I believe he does the best job of articulating where we find ourselves in terms that are relevant to parents and teachers.

The Five Literacies



Attention

- Awareness of what is the appropriate level of attention for a given situation
 - When to give undivided attention, and when to multi-task
- Learning how to transition attention when the situation demands it
 - This requires mindfulness and internal discipline
- This literacy is a tricky one, because as adults we don't fully understand it and definitely haven't mastered it. (ie: Driving while talking on a cellphone.)



Critical Consumption

- Knowing how to ask a good question
- Knowing how to evaluate the quality of the answer
 - Online this means researching a site and determining ownership
 - Knowing how to drill down to original documentation and go for the source
 - Cutting through the “noise”

¹ www.rheingold.com



Participation

- Using blogs, generating content, wikis, and other means of public discourse
- Contributing to the collective environment
- No longer a passive consumer, but an active and empowered creator
- Finding a voice, even if it is very localized (ie: friends and family)



Collaboration

- Knowing how to use tools for collaborative functions
- FlashMobs, Citizen Journalism, Emergent Collective Response to Events, group projects, Wikis (check out this school's blog: <http://blog.ps119amersfort.com/?p=1143>)
- Creating learning projects across distance
- Organizing collective action and participatory democracy



Network Awareness

- Understanding what a network is and what it is good for.
- Who is in it?
- How can I use it to meet my goals?
- How can I be useful to others so they can be useful to me?
- Setting up Personal Learning Networks.
- Knowing how to sample the flow of information
- Understanding the difference between one's audience (passive), and one's public (active participant, in dialogue with you)

Do these 21st century literacies replace traditional literacies?

No.

These literacies are built on the back of what we think of as traditional literacies. Reading, writing, the logic of mathematical thinking, and good citizenship are all prerequisites for developing 21st Century Literacies.

In fact, in many ways, as parents and educators we need to return to some of the fundamentals of progressive educational thinking.

A holistic approach to learning, teaching critical thinking, and a reinvestment in developing the Habits of Mind² which will create empowered, thoughtful children.

Where is this learning happening now?



At the moment, much of the learning around technology and 21st Century Literacies is happening outside of traditional educational environments. It is largely a peer-to-peer phenomenon.

Some experts have suggested that the kind of Critical Thinking and Participatory skills required for 21st Century Literacies are antithetical to a formal learning environment because Critical Thinking is often linked with Disrespect for Authority, and therefore is viewed with mistrust by public school systems.³

² Costa, A.L, *Discovering and Exploring the Habits of Mind*, 2000. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

³ Rheingold, Howard. 21st Century Literacies. (July 2009) Video Presentation: Reboot Britain Conference. Retrieved from: <http://blip.tv/file/2373937>

I believe that, just as progressive education is easier to implement in a small setting, these skills can also be taught in a smaller, more innovative educational environment. One that has the freedom and the vision to pioneer new strategies, and talented faculty and staff that put children at the center of their model, rather than serving the interests and requirements of a top-down, heavily bureaucratic model.

Small, forward-thinking schools like Miami Country Day hold the best hope for this kind of innovation.

Myth of the Digital Native



As a society, we are so bedazzled and enthralled with the rapid pace and amazing power of our technological development that we've given very little attention to evolving our social structures to keep up.

Teens “sex-ting”, accidents caused by driving while texting, issues of online privacy, and online bullying and predation; these are all good indicators that we don't really have a handle on mitigating the potentially negative impacts of this new technology.

I also believe that these new capabilities speak deeply to the human desire to connect and belong, and simply saying “turn it off” and “firewall it” is not the answer. These tools hold tremendous power to change the way humans relate to each other across time and space, and I believe that it is important that adults begin to understand and develop a strategy for teaching the ethics of new technologies.

One of the big myths these days is that the so called Millennial Generation—a.k.a Digital Natives—are going to somehow magically possess the ability to integrate this technological evolution seamlessly into their lives for the better.

While I believe it is true that today's children will be very technically proficient in using technology in an intuitive way, I don't believe they will automatically get the social and ethical implications behind the hardware.

The kinds of social competencies we're talking about with 21st Century Literacies must be learned. And it is the job of the parents, teachers, community leaders, and government leaders to start to think about this.

We need to evolve our social models to catch up with our capabilities. It may be 20 years or more before we fully understand the ramifications of what is happening now. As educational leaders, you can be out front in this issue.

How do we parent and teach to these new challenges?

Reinvest in the basics

- Reading, writing, math, hands-on science
 - Don't throw the baby out with the bath-water
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Creativity
- Good citizenship

Appreciate that 21st Century Literacies are a bottom-up phenomenon

- These strategies presume an empowered way of learning and a participatory culture.
- Look for ways to co-teach with your students. Let them develop questions, determine courses of action, and initiate projects
- Inevitably you will be in a position where your students may know more than you do about a technology or online application. Don't panic. This offers two important opportunities:

- Co-teaching: Let them demonstrate and develop a lesson to teach the class using the technology or application
- For older kids raise the ethics question, and let them think about a framework for social behavior around the power of the technology. For instance:
 - Q: “Is it appropriate to text a friend when you’re hanging out with another friend? Does it depend? Why or why not?”
 - Q: “Let’s talk about the implications of taking a picture of your friend doing something inappropriate. Would you send it around? Why or why not?”
- Know that it is not your job to know how to push every button, but rather it is your job to understand and teach the social and ethical implications of pushing those buttons

Create clear strategies around technology & attention

- Help kids to develop meta-cognition about attention
- What requires undivided attention/what does not
- Teach the skill of attention as a concept throughout K-12
- Give families at-home strategies for building attention awareness

Teach mindfulness – the inner eye

- Now I am paying attention to one thing
- Now I am quiet
- Now I am listening
- Now it is my turn

Look beyond technology skills to community and thinking skills

- Right now we are focused on the technology
- Need to expand our thinking 10 or 15 years to plan for the literacies

Further exploration for Future Thinking

BOOKS

Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide

Henry Jenkins

978-0814742815

NUY Press (9/08) \$18.95 PA

Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations

Clay Shirky

978-0143114949

Penguin (2/09) \$16.00 PA

Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty

Zygmunt Bauman

978-0745639871

Polity (2/07) \$14.95 PA

OTHER RESOURCES

21st Century Literacies—Howard Rheingold: <http://blip.tv/file/2373937> (40 min. video)

A mini-course on network and social network literacy—Howard Rheingold:
<http://howardrheingold.posterous.com/a-min-course-on-network-and-social-network-li> (2 x 20 min. videos)

Attention Literacy—Howard Rheingold

http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/rheingold/detail?blogid=108&entry_id=38828

Twitter Literacy—Howard Rheingold

http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/rheingold/detail?blogid=108&entry_id=39948

Online Crap Detection 101—Howard Rheingold

www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/rheingold/detail?entry_id=42805

Mindful Infotention: Dashboards, Radars, Filters—Howard Rheingold

http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/blogs/rheingold/detail?blogid=108&entry_id=46677

Kids' Technology Anthropologist Mimi Ito on Participation Literacy: What parents, educators ought to know about trends in kids' use of participation literacy. (3 part video interview)

<http://www.smartmobs.com/2010/01/02/video-interview-mimi-ito-on-participation-literacy-part-one-of-three/>

Henry Jenkins: ***Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century.*** (2006) Boston: The Center for Comparative Media Studies (MIT) & The MacArthur Foundation. Retrieved from: http://www.digitalllearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF

The MacArthur Foundation: ***Building the Field of Digital Media and Learning,*** a \$50m initiative. Homepage: <http://digitalllearning.macfound.org>

P.S. 119 Amersfort School of Social Awareness -Magnet School of Global & Ethical Studies – 3829 Avenue K, Brooklyn NY 11210 (718) 377-7696. Homepage: <http://blog.ps119amersfort.com/>

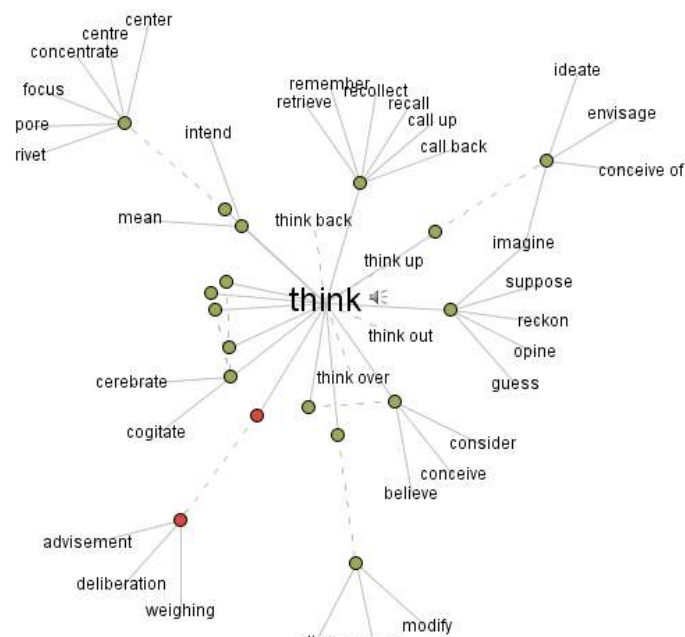
BIG THINKERS

Howard Rheingold—Professor of Social Media Studies-U.C. Berkeley & Stanford University. www.rheingold.com (Twitter: twitter.com/hrheingold)

Kevin Kelly—Founder-*Wired* Magazine, frequent contributor on these issues. www.kk.org

Henry Jenkins—Former director, the [MIT Comparative Media Studies Program](http://www.mit.edu/~comstudies/). Currently on the faculty at USC's *Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism* and *School of Cinematic Arts*. www.henryjenkins.org (Twitter: twitter.com/henryjenkins)

Melanie McBride—Toronto-based educator & consultant specializing in Digital Literacies. Great blog posts for educators. www.melaniemcbride.net



About Kristen McLean

Kristen McLean is the Executive Director of the *Association of Booksellers for Children (ABC)*, a non-profit trade association that was founded in 1984 with the mission of supporting the vitality of independent children's bookselling, and providing a network for the children's book industry.

Prior to her tenure at ABC, Kristen spent twelve years in the children's book and toy industry in various roles including frontline retailing, buying, commission sales, and managing marketing for one of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's children's imprints. She is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, where she concentrated in the Psychology of Creativity, and has studied Graphic and Industrial Design at Massachusetts College of Art.

As part of her role as an industry strategist, Kristen lectures extensively on issues facing the Publishing world including the effect of technology and culture on books and reading, the role of bookstores and libraries in the lives of 21st century readers, and emerging models for the Publishing Industry. She regularly presents at Book Expo America (BEA), The American Library Association (ALA), the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators national conference (SCBWI), and at regional booksellers' conferences throughout the US.

She writes regular commentary on her blog www.pixiestixkidspix.com. Find out more at www.abfc.com.

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