

SHARED VISION A THRESHOLD FORUM

A panel of leaders seeks common ground among media literacy, information literacy, and ICT literacy—and maps out a road for education to reach it.

WHAT KIND OF LITERACY IS THIS?

• • • **Faith Rogow:** When you think about media literacy—or 21st century skills or information literacy skills or ICT skills, or whatever term *you* use—what do you envision students learning that they're not learning from traditional schooling or traditional literacy instruction?

• • • **Don Knezek:** In looking at where the learning landscape is now, it's clear that student preparation has to do with their ability to do two things: access and analyze—that is, look for reliable and credible resources and determine their credibility. We think students are doing pretty well on their own in learning to access information, but analyzing sources and interpreting communication are areas that we see a deficiency in. Also, we see very few programs that are

preparing students to produce formal communication using the tools and media that are accessible to students outside school.

• • • **Dawn Vaughn:** Students today are very quick to Google something and take the first five choices, rather than looking at who created that information and where is the bias—assessing each piece of information as to whether it's something that they should use. We're still bound by traditional methods of analysis and writing that don't connect with what kids are doing outside of school. We need to learn how to integrate the resources that are available today into a good core curriculum and teach kids to be critical thinkers.

• • • **Rogow:** Is it that kids aren't being challenged to be critical thinkers at all, or that they're not being challenged to be critical thinkers using modern technologies and communications tools?

• • • **Vaughn:** Many kids today *are* being challenged to think critically, but when they go online and look for resources to support a document, they don't critically select those sources. They take the first choices rather than the best choices. In the library, when we work with kids on honing search skills, they are amazed at how they can pinpoint quality resources. Finding information is not the problem; it's finding the best information and making critical choices when using it.

• • • **Milton Chen:** Boy, I couldn't agree more. I guess my answer to the question is that students are not getting school systems that understand these issues. Mostly what we see are individual teachers and occasionally principals who are trying to move their schools toward these kinds of information

PARTICIPANTS

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skills, but most school systems—and certainly the national conversation around curriculum and teaching—are still very much textbook-bound. We have not thought about the structure of schools in a very different way, from a leadership position. It's very hard to do. It's also very threatening.

• • • **Rogow:** Who do you think it threatens?

• • • **Chen:** It threatens the current system. Once we move to a kind of classroom where kids have technology, where they're able to find and assess information on their own, where they're able to produce information in multimedia forms, that's a very different kind of classroom. It means the teacher has to play a different role. It means that the entire structure around those students has to be different. It changes the school schedule. It gets kids out in the community. It is threatening to current methods of school finance, school organization, structure, and bureaucracy. It's an organizational and structural issue, and also a political issue.

• • • **Vaughn:** Many teachers today have not been prepared to facilitate the classroom that Milton is envisioning. It's also threatening to parents, because if you take students out of a classroom or a school that runs from 7 to 3 every day, students may have more freedom than parents would like them to have at age 14.

• • • **Knezek:** I do feel that we've got a newer generation of school leaders—principals in particular, and curriculum leaders—who understand that we've got to make the move. They're hungry to know how to do that

and they are frustrated by the structure that we have. I sense that we are approaching a tipping point, where we have the kind of support we need from school-level leadership at least. I'm not sure if it's district-level leadership yet, or at the board level or the parent level, but those who are closest to students are sensing that we're not in step. If we can see some models that work and are actually doable, then I'm hopeful that we have a chance to move things forward.

WHO ARE THE CHANGE AGENTS?

• • • **Rogow:** Given that change happens so slowly in schools, who's the most important target audience for bringing change?

• • • **Knezek:** At ISTE, we look at federal policy as one of the key pieces, as well as state policy. Teachers have the best tools we've ever had for connectivity and the Internet, and then we filter every one of those connections and say to teachers, "We're not going to allow you to teach responsibility or allow a developmental sequence for your students so that they're protected at nine years old, but learning responsibility at 18." The second audience is school leadership. Without a culture on campus that supports these skills in teachers, we're still swimming upstream against a violent current.

• • • **Vaughn:** At the national level, we've seen progress through organizations that have information-literacy skills embedded in the curriculum, and then with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. But so much of what we're fighting right now at AASL is that school



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"The case that we haven't made strongly enough to leaders is that this is not a frill; it's about learning and a new way of understanding and creating knowledge."
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librarians are being taken out of the schools. Incorporating information literacy into all of the curriculum areas teaches critical-thinking skills, and it is important to have a professional in the schools doing that.

• • • **Chen:** When you look at the job categories we've already mentioned, there are a lot of different folks who need this information, who need to share this cause—policymakers, school leadership, principals, school-board members, school librarians, universities, and schools of education. Active parents also need to understand the importance of this shift in knowledge and information and media. We try to target the top 10 percent of all those job categories, including teachers. When you've got 3 million teachers, just reaching the top 10 percent is a daunting challenge.

• • • **Rogow:** Teachers have also been AMLA's focus, or at least practitioners. Not always classroom teachers, but educators generally, and also higher education—those who are training teachers and researchers who can begin to look at how we establish best practices. We certainly recognize the importance of public policy, but think you can have all the top-down policy you want, and if the practitioners on the ground aren't doing it, it doesn't help very much.

• • • **Chen:** We sometimes say that the audience is not so much a set of job categories, but a psychographic—change agents who share and understand the kind of change we're talking about. Across every job category or group, it is those people who are the real audience for this kind of change.

RESOURCES

Alliance for a Media Literate America.
www.amlainfo.org

American Association of School Librarians.
www.ala.org/aasl

Cable in the Classroom: Media Literacy.
www.ciconline.org/mediasmart

The George Lucas Educational Foundation.
www.glef.org

International Society for Technology in Education.
www.iste.org

SAME TUNE, DIFFERENT WORDS?

• • • **Rogow:** I heard lots of overlap in our descriptions of what kids need. Yet all of us use different terminology. Are we talking about the same thing and just using different terminology, or are there genuine differences?

• • • **Knezek:** There are differences, but there's also a core that's very close to the same. For example, media literacy is in our technology standards, and yet we are most interested in making sure the foundation skills are in place so that students can go to the next level. But the fact that we want to apply new and emerging literacies to the education arena is a piece that slices across every one of us.

• • • **Vaughn:** To me, information literacy overlies everything we do—it's the umbrella that sits on top of all this, regardless of the technology we use or whether we're trying to be critical thinkers of media or critical thinkers of written work. It's about how to use technology in a way that enhances instruction. It's not a curriculum that sits by itself, but is involved in all of the skills that we're talking about.

• • • **Rogow:** For AMLA, media literacy is the broad umbrella term—both teaching *with* and *about* new technologies. I picture it as the double helix of a DNA strand—you don't have one without the other.

• • • **Chen:** When I've asked kids, they just say it's about communication—"we're just trying to communicate with each other, with our teachers, that's what it's about." And they're right. The case that we haven't made strongly enough to leaders is that this is not a frill; it's about learning and a new way of understanding and creating knowledge. There is a real prejudice against non-verbal forms of learning. If kids are examining images in the classroom, people think it is a waste of time because the real work ought to be in reading the textbook and writing. We've built a culture that prizes the word and not the image or the sound.

• • • **Knezek:** And that's such a shame when you look at what's really having the impact, what's winning and losing elections, what's causing public opinion to swing. Print is no longer the dominant means of communicating, yet we continue to put the vast majority of our efforts in education toward literacy in the written word.

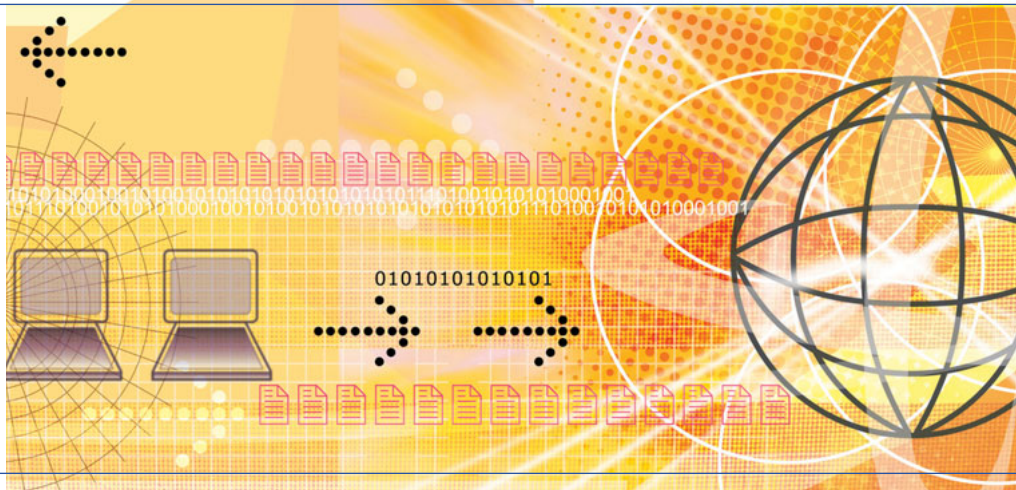
• • • **Rogow:** There's also an assumption that the way to get to higher-order thinking skills is through the

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printed word, and yet every one of us voiced that the core piece of this is critical-thinking skills, no matter what we label it.

• • • **Chen:** We haven’t shown how the study of images and sound integrates with reading and writing. I think people view this as either/or. “It might be nice if kids learned to make films, but that’s time taken away from reading and writing.” The multimedia approach and the integration of these skills is something that needs to be demonstrated.

CHANGES OR CONSEQUENCES?

• • • **Rogow:** If an education genie showed up on your doorstep and said you could make one change happen in America’s schools tomorrow, what would you want to see?

• • • **Chen:** That one’s easy: shift the curriculum from a textbook-based curriculum to a project-based curriculum. If you saw that happening, and you saw students working together in teams, using technology, a lot more of what we’re talking about would come to pass. I think it is that change that we’re still struggling with—that knowledge is not something you learn from a book, but something that you learn to produce on your own through project work, through working together with other students, using multiple sources of information.

• • • **Knezek:** I would want the whole school system transformed to use all of the available resources of the new learning landscape. There are so many resources now, so many opportunities in the landscape of young learners, and public education is using such a small piece of them.

• • • **Vaughn:** And I would add another—it’s the technology and the librarians and the teachers working together, guiding students toward thinking critically about the material they’re engaging with. Kids can’t do it alone, they have to have guides. They have to have teachers who are astute and prepared and trained to teach this material.

• • • **Rogow:** From AMLA’s perspective, if every teacher had the training and the confidence to go into the classroom with a media-literacy filter applied to everything that they do, that would be our key to transformation. What do you think the consequences will be if schools don’t take this on?

• • • **Vaughn:** I think if we don’t succeed, we’re going to see what schools fear the most—that public education is going to have trouble being relevant for the future. With No Child Left Behind, we’re trying to raise the rigor, and yet in some ways, we are going backward as far as looking only at pure reading and writing skills—we need to prepare kids for the future. They live in a multimedia world. Without pushing them forward, public schools are going to end up with an irrelevant curriculum. People are going to find other ways to learn, something more relevant and engaging. There are serious implications for the existence of public education as a dominant option for education.

• • • **Rogow:** I also think that we endanger democracy itself—the Jeffersonian notion that you can’t have a democracy without an informed citizenry. Given the world we live in, you can’t have an informed citizenry unless we are fluent in these new technologies and 21st century skills. • • •