KATHLEEN TYNER
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(QUOTE)

When you define a field, it has certain characteristics before it becomes a field. One of these characteristics is an agreement on professional practices -- common shared knowledge of professional practices. For example, journalism has broadly recognized professional practices that define the field. Media literacy doesn't have a comparable consensus.

BIOGRAPHY OF KATHLEEN TYNER

Kathleen Tyner is associate professor in the Dept. of Radio-TV-Film in the College of Communications at the University of Texas at Austin. As author of texts such as "Literacy in a Digital World: Teaching and Learning in the Age of Information," and "Visions/Revisions: Moving Forward with Media Literacy," Tyner is an expert on media literacy and the uses of new media in formal and informal learning spaces. She began her career in journalism and media production in San Francisco.

INTERVIEW TEXT

Selected Questions:

How did you become involved in media education?

Were there specific texts and scholars that inspired you?

Any obstacles or surprises?

So, do you think media education belongs in the education system?

Are they (teachers) being constrained?

Do you see a specific outlet, for example, digital storytelling, or something along those lines?

In regards to the field of media education, what you would like to see happen in the future?

DM: How did you become involved in media education?

KT: I had a teaching credential, but went into journalism and media and production rather early. In San Francisco, I worked at the City Station to do political programming with multiple shows per week. One of the news programs was a roundtable with local journalists and we analyzed the top local stories of the week. During that time I could see that news and information was packaged -- I could see the spin factor at work. When I was in undergraduate school, I worked with politicians and knew that this was just part of the political profession. So, I thought that given my teaching background and my background in news, that it would be really important for people to understand that reporting is not only about being able to read and write newspapers and TV news, but is mostly about being able to deconstruct sources and analyze an argument and make decisions in a civic arena. So I'm interested in the craft of production, as well as the content.

During the course of my work, I've also been motivated by my strong interest in the arts. In particular, in non-narrative, experimental, and avant-garde art. With the decline of art in public schools, people don't have a lot of opportunity to appreciate and use and understand the artistic process. They have easy access to a limited range of production models that are familiar to television and the Hollywood factory model. But they don't have a lot of opportunity to experience the media arts -- things like Super 8 or 16 mm film and other kinds of archival media forms that have inspired artists over time. I have written about the "tyranny of the narrative" as an emphasis in media education of narrative over aesthetics. It is one thing to deconstruct literature, but especially when we get into the realm of virtual worlds and gaming, most people do not yet have the aesthetic vocabulary to really discuss and thoroughly enjoy what they are seeing and to share that in the public realm. So I always thought that the best way to teach about media was to marry production with analysis.

Since the early 1980s, I've worked on projects that rely on innovative computer applications and have witnessed the shift to digital literacy firsthand. It's been an interesting ride. In 1984, I worked on one of the first US videotex projects for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. We were trying to do something like the French "Minitel." The *Chronicle Videotex* was created with cables and kiosks all over the city in San Francisco long before we had the Internet web. The problem was that they didn't quite have a coherent business model. They were still trying to use the newspaper model of classified advertising and display ads and they didn't quite know how to leverage – or even really count -- their user traffic data. So it was really a starting point in the history of the Internet and developed a lot of processes through localized, connected new media that people have since tried to refine. I'm still not sure if the business model is there yet!

The question remains: Where do people get news that's reported in a professional way with gatekeepers who understand the journalism profession versus bloggers -- some of whom are very professional, some of whom are not? This extends to broadcast news. When there is a need for local news, television and radio are not 'dead' at all. People still depend on broadcast media. So the forms overlap, but don't necessarily die out. Except when they do. I will miss Kodachrome.

There is a lot of research done on the ubiquitous, pervasive nature of information flow and the fact that it has just proliferated to the extent that people have a lot more choice. But like anything else – when you go in the supermarket, for example – a lot more choice isn't always an efficient way to make decisions.

And so as the print, analog, and digital collided I decided to start a non-profit organization called Strategies for Media Literacy in the late 1980s to support media literacy education. It lasted until the dot-com crash and created a lot of resources, support, and workshops for teachers that are still used today.

DM: Were there specific texts and scholars that inspired you?

KT: I was inspired by the scholarship of Walter J. Ong who actually did have an astute vision of the Internet before he stopped writing. I think that the linguistic work of James Paul Gee was groundbreaking and really important for media studies. Rudolf Arnheim's work on film theory and aesthetics is as important today as it was when he wrote it. When I started the non-profit, I had a lot of help from the Canadian Association for Media Literacy, the British Film Institute, and the Australian Teachers of Media along the way. The key concepts, critical questions, and rubrics that they used to organize media education efforts were useful to me then and are still the basis for the critical questions that media literacy advocates use today.

I also learned so much from the experimental film community in San Francisco, which has been very inspirational and supportive of my media education work, especially the Pacific Film Archive, San Francisco Cinematheque, and Other Cinema in the Bay Area. I am inspired by 20th Century artists like Marcel Duchamp and also by contemporary experimental filmmakers.

When I look to new media, I draw from a broad palette of pop culture insights, as well as from academic scholarship. I am inspired by things like Ray Kurtzweil and Vernor Vinge's ideas about singularity and Gordon Moore of Intel who came up with Moore's Law. I value archival media as a way to provide important contextual information for my students. Brewster Kahle's concept of the "Wayback Machine" and Rick Prelinger's curating of ephemeral media on the Internet Archive have been inspirational and helpful in my teaching.

I realize now that unless you know something about software programming, you cannot be completely literate in today's society. Most of us don't know how to program – including me – so in order to maintain high levels of literacy, it's good to try to keep on top of structural trends and to sort the long trends from the short trends. Right now, younger kids are more likely to learn programming at home or in a non-profit organization than they are during the school day.

I do admire the scholars who take both the long and the broad view of digital literacy. In the context of media education, I like David Buckingham's work because he takes a longer view and also understands the aesthetic component. Sonia Livingstone's work is groundbreaking and writers like S. Craig Watkins, Mimi Ito, Lissa Soep and Steve Goodman always give me new insights into the social uses of new media with young people. I like the work of Gunther Kress because he understands the history of literacy and puts digital literacy in a multi-literacy context

with a design element. Right now I am following the work of Daniel Pink who calls for interdisciplinary, blurred boundaries between art and science, which makes a lot of sense to me.

DM: Any obstacles or surprises?

KT: Human nature doesn't surprise me so much anymore. But in terms of media literacy education, I expect surprises because I never considered media literacy to be a field or a movement. **When you define a field, it has certain characteristics before it becomes a field. One of these characteristics is an agreement on professional practices -- common shared knowledge of professional practices. For example, journalism has broadly recognized professional practices that define the field. Media literacy doesn't have a comparable consensus.** This is because media literacy is an extension of literacy and it has always been a messy subject. You can tell the same story around Gutenberg and his invention of the printing press.

I mean, is literacy – writ large – a movement? Is literacy a field? So, why would media literacy be a field? And who can agree on the mission of a media literacy movement? In their groundbreaking 1996 essay, "*A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures,*" The New London Group brilliantly represents literacy as a complex, multi-literacy concept of design. Similarly, I have represented literacy as a multi-literacy mandala with an emphasis on multiple pathways to literacy and the tension between content and contexts. I think that the emphasis is on dialogues of literacy as a concept in process and so we jump in and examine it from various perspectives. Instead, people get hung up arguing about the definitions and purposes of media education instead of jumping in the flow of dialogue about the strategic and pleasurable uses of literacy.

I do understand that field-building techniques are a way to exert awareness and influence in academic circles or workplace development circles or political circles, or policy circles. That's to be expected and for the most part, it stimulates dialogue about literacy. These dialogues can't be expected to define media literacy, but they do provide useful support and strategies for practitioners. But in this rapidly changing media environment, I doubt that anyone is going to corner the "market" on media literacy definitions, purposes, policies or critical questions.

At its core, literacy is still simply about human communication and the need for human beings to use it to gain social capital and exert power and influence and so on. Literacy helps us to look out for and balance of collective interests with our individual interests. Literacy is a tool of strategy, negotiation and expression. It is an essential skill. If you study the history of literacy, the need to control and shape the educational process around the uses of literacy tools and texts is always attached to literacy attainment. But the path is unique to every person. Scholar Harvey Graff explains this in *The Labyrinths of Literacy*.

DM: So, do you think media education belongs in the education system?

KT: Of course it belongs in education. Like print literacy, it shoots across the curriculum. It is disappointing that it is so often narrowly conceived and ghettoized in "educational technology" courses. Again, if you think of the need to analyze and use both technical skills and artistic

processes to create new media, then it makes sense that media education is an integral, interdisciplinary basic for formal education. But part of the problem is that we have diminished the role of the arts in public education to the extent that you have to ask, "What's the point?" If we don't have time for project-based learning and if we are going to rely on standardized test scores as the main way to design learning environments, then why not just do distance education in the comfort of your own home?

Content delivery is fine, but when it is the only pedagogical goal, it does not serve media education in either formal or informal learning environments. Instead, it blunts critical dialogue and hands-on expression. Even when production takes place, I've seen media education in public schools used mostly as vehicles for information or public service messages or other kinds of values inculcation. There's no joy in this. This type of media production may be useful for social activists and it may be well intended, but artists sometimes feel bullied by the pressure to narrowly use their skills to deliver a message, especially when the message might be amorphous. Instead, they are exploring color, or maybe they are exploring a process around montage, or maybe they are exploring the artistic process of specific media. And so when production is introduced in K-12 education, it can be very heavy-handed and adult-driven. This kind of values inculcation extends to analysis when the goal of analysis is framed as a way to influence broader social and cultural issues.

So it must be very frustrating because people don't have any consistent outlets for their preferred literacies in school. Instead their uses of media look more like ed-tech lessons or life skills education or something. Especially now, kids create and share and critique media all of the time, especially with gaming, but until recently, no one taught them this or talked about it in school. They are hungry to learn about media and to exercise their literacy skills. When they find kindred spirits in their online communities, they talk about different things, not only about the narrative of the game or the rules of the games but how they are created and the pleasure they get from the aesthetic and who did it well and how it was done and audience issues. They compare and critique and defend their preferences. They create their own avatars and use Maya or Alice software to understand the way that games are created. It's not enough to simply create "educationally acceptable" games and introduce them in the formal classroom as a new form of textbook. I asked a teenager if he liked to play educational video games. He told me that "I love to play video games but do I play educational games? Uh, that's ok." He thought that educational games were kind of pathetic because they didn't have the same degree of risk and challenge and learning opportunities that he experienced in commercial games. James Paul Gee writes about this all the time.

Formal education has somewhat lost its way and part of it is because it was so intertwined with print literacy. As that connection unraveled the school system hasn't yet found its footing in new media. There are people that understand this connection between literacy and learning very well, like Henry Jenkins and Katie Salen. But others have yet to come to terms with the integration of new media across the formal school curriculum. A whole generation of teachers raised on print media is retiring, but I don't necessarily see that new generations of teachers are embracing new media in the current school system – even though teachers use it outside of school all the time.

DM: Are they (teachers) being constrained?

KT: Constrained by the system, I can see that. Or perhaps in some cases they are book people who gravitated to the education system because that's where the print is. I am not sure. It's not necessarily about the literacy tools or access. It's about the design of learning environments that are out of sync with contemporary communication practices. But the point is that kids are desperate for a place that is meaningful and resonates with their prior literacy experiences and incorporates their really valuable skills in production and knowledge creation and sharing.

DM: Do you see a specific outlet, for example, digital storytelling, or something along those lines?

KT: Storytelling is a good bridge for people who understand narrative structure and interpret media from that cognitive lens. When we talk to teachers about narratives I think they are in a comfort zone, so storytelling is a way to introduce the integration of more types of media in the classroom.

But media education can't stop with learning about storytelling techniques. We can't forget the fact that film or video production isn't only about the story. In fact I would argue that especially in virtual worlds, the characters as well as the aesthetics could spontaneously drive the narrative. Also, narrative structure is peculiar to each medium and in order to be really broadly literate you might be able to negotiate the different discourses of each of those media not only in a narrative structure with dialogue, but in their aesthetic values and the limitations of the technologies that create them. These media forms also create the meaning in a very McLuhanist way. Once you have an opportunity to discuss these things with people in media education courses then I do think that people are really smart and have been immersed in all these media for their whole lives now and are kind of dying to talk about it – even if they don't quite have an opportunity or might not have the vocabulary to address it at first. But once you find a bridge, or what teachers would call a scaffolding process, like digital storytelling, it can open a portal and all kinds of discussion about the various discourses of each media that help people to become more broadly and deeply literate.

DM: In regards to the field of media education, what you would like to see happen in the future?

KT: I would like to see more integration of media arts and project-based learning across the curriculum in public education. I'd like to see more emphasis on the artistic process, including critique and apprenticeships. We need more opportunities to teach about programming and computer systems for young people who want to explore those areas. Sometime in the future, I think that people will simply say "literacy" and assume that all media forms are included in this term. I'd like it very much if the phrase "media literacy" would fade into a broader and dynamic concept of literacy. It is already an anachronism in its own time.