

# Greening Media Literacy Education

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Media literacy educators already cover a variety of topics related to the environment. The following table has further suggestions.

## *Crossover Tools and Topics*

Tools and techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mapmaking/environmental documentation (using media to document learner’s landscape of experience)</li> <li>Disarticulation of corporate frames of nature through semiotics and media deconstruction</li> <li>Orienteering with the ecomedia wheel (holistic situation of media in learner’s lifeworld)</li> <li>Mediamaking/storytelling (harnessing media tools to become empowered communicators in the learner’s home community)</li> <li>Autoethnographies (journaling or webcam monologs for self-reflection)</li> <li>Convergence media practices (collaborative mediamaking)</li> <li>Digital storytelling for narratives of connection</li> </ul>
Curriculum themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consumption and sustainability</li> <li>Representation of nature in marketing</li> <li>Evaluating the ecological claims of products</li> <li>Deconstructing environmental news and framing of environmental issues</li> <li>Car ads and the matrix of the oil economy</li> <li>Food—fast food, nutrition, soda and sugar ads, etc.</li> <li>Bottled water</li> <li>Health and the environment</li> <li>Greenwashing</li> <li>Climate change media</li> <li>Environment and social justice</li> <li>Animals in the media (including wildlife films)</li> <li>Alternative media and artist responses to environmental issues</li> </ul>

## **Discourse Analysis and Semiotics**

Media literacy has pioneered techniques for analyzing the way media frame issues, both visually and textually. Since discourse analysis can be applied to news and propaganda, green media educators can use this tool to examine how a critical issue such as climate change is covered in the news, or how to detect greenwashing. Claims makers—from BP to Greenpeace—vie for public attention. What strategies do they use, and what systems enable some voices and not others? Often semiotics is used for studying representation, in particular, racial, gender, and cultural stereotyping. Animals and living systems are also used and stereotyped in a variety of ways. Why and for what purpose?

## **Authenticity and Resonance**

Media literacy techniques have mastered deconstruction, drawing attention to nearly 30 different persuasion techniques used to manipulate and hook our attention. The primary technique, emotional transfer, is represented by how marketers (or propagandists for that matter) generate

feelings in order to transfer those sensibilities to brands. But the various emotions generated by sex, fear, and humor are tied to more ancient needs related to our connection with living systems. Media literacy could point out that when advertisers are manipulating our emotions, they are trying to tap into deeper experiences of authenticity and resonance that can be fulfilled by activities that don't require consumption, and could even tie into our primary need to connect with humans and nature.

### **Economics and Ideology**

The critical analysis of ideology is usually applied in the form of critical media literacy and aims to challenge the claims made by corporations and governments. In the age of Occupy Wall Street, much attention has been applied to the way in which economic values are propagated through media. To this extent, it is absolutely necessary to examine those discourses surrounding growth, progress and consumption, and how they lead to debt on multiple levels: personal, social and ecological. To what extent are both economics and ecology ultimately two sides of the same coin?

An additional dimension can be explored: different media promote a range of environmental ideologies—beliefs about how we act upon the world—spanning from anthropocentric to ecocentric perspectives. What implications do these different worldviews have for ecology? Moreover, given that most media literacy aspires to greater democratic participation, it would be good to examine the kind of democracy we believe in. Is it anthropocentric, or could we work towards Vandana Shiva's concept of Earth Democracy?

### **The Cultural Commons**

Educators working on media justice can link the enclosure of the techno-communication system by telecoms and media corporations with the enclosure of the cultural commons. IP law, anti-piracy legislation and corporate mergers all have the effect of limiting democratic participation and access to cultural resources. Highlighting the importance of open culture, reformed copyright laws and a less restrictive approach to sharing can also be tied to how corporations are privatizing food and water resources.

### **Intertextuality**

People should not just think about ecosystems, but think like ecosystems. This means examining our mental models and learning to think in terms of systems, relationships and connectivity. Our social networks do this naturally, but what about media texts? Traditional media literacy tends to focus on single texts (e.g., an alcohol ad), but what if we looked at texts as if they were nodes in the media ecosystem? The way the web makes all texts open works does that for us. Consider how the viral video Kony 2012 became a dialogue between many different texts produced by a vast range of critics and supporters; or how a WikiLeaks document becomes linked to a web of ideas and practices; or how the film *Avatar* made linkages to various genres and tropes from other films, and then how fans and activists remixed and spread various memes from the film to support environmental activism.

### **Gadgets**

Media education programs rarely critically engage the tools used to make media. We should celebrate the creative process and promote the empowerment of mediamaking, yet we should not ignore the fact that the gadgets we use have an increasingly negative impact on global ecology and social justice.

### **Phenomenology**

Most media literacy looks outwardly to ask questions about what media do to us. Sometimes the

question is changed to focus on what we do with media. But what about the manner in which media influence our cognition—for better or for worse? How does media engagement impact our sense of space, place and time? What are the *spaces* we are engaging? How might this experience of extending ourselves into media networks impact our *sense of planet*? For this, it will be necessary to incorporate the perspectives of the media ecology tradition which focuses on these problems and to apply an ecopsychology perspective.

### **Alternative Cultural Practices**

There is a tendency among many media educators to focus on the negative aspects of mass media. But we also need to support positive media practices that build trust (as opposed to distrust). After all, media are a necessary means for solving problems. While I fully endorse critical approaches, I also would like to warn against too much negativity that leads to learners feeling powerless and victimized. We need to pull people towards aspirational solutions. This is a slightly different take on problem-solving pedagogies that focus on how to fix problems. Rather, we should encourage learners to create solutions. The difference is subtle but important. What we are aiming for is supporting lifelong learning skills that build towards sustainable cultural practices that can envision a positive response to a very wicked problem.

### **Cross-disciplinary Collaboration**

I believe that media literacy practitioners could collaborate with and learn from organizations such as the Cloud Institute and Center for Ecoliteracy, which have been able to synchronize education for sustainability with some Common Core Standards. Standards developed by the Cloud Institute that crossover with ecomedia literacy include sustainable economics, healthy commons, natural laws, responsible local and global citizenship and the dynamics of systems.

There needs to be cross-disciplinary dialogue and collaboration. It would be greatly beneficial for media literacy organizations to collaborate with education for sustainability organizations such as the Cloud Institute.

### **Ethics Not Persuasion**

Media literacy educators argue that aims and purposes determine the methods (such as scaffolding skills versus didacticism). I agree that scaffolding and empowerment are essential. I also agree that didactic media literacy is no better than persuasion and does not work. However, I also feel that it is necessary to have an explicit and transparent moral framework that informs practice. Just as journalism has a normative purpose to be accountable to the public interest, media literacy educators should not be afraid to commit to an ethic of care for the environment; nor should a commitment to fighting climate disruption be seen as an agenda.

### **Green Cultural Citizenship**

Green cultural citizenship is embodying sustainable behaviors and cultural practices that shape and promote ecological values within the interconnected realms of society, economy and environment.

In order to encourage green cultural citizenship, media literacy should support learners to:

- reconnect an awareness of media with their physiological impact on living systems;
- recognize media's phenomenological influence on the perception of time, space, place and cognition;
- understand media's interdependence with the global economy, and how the current model of globalization impacts living systems;
- analyze how media form symbolic associations and discourses that promote environmental ideologies; and

- become conscious of how media impact our ability to engage in sustainable cultural practices by encouraging new uses of media that promote sustainability.

**Enduring Question:** Curriculum designers can consider the following question as a guiding framework:

What constitutes a healthy media ecosystem?

### **Ecomedia Literacy**

Ecomedia literacy is understanding how everyday media practice impacts our ability to live sustainably within earth's ecological parameters for the present and future.

#### **Ecomedia Literacy Skills:**

- Research gadget production (information literacy)
- Deconstruct gadget marketing (media content analysis)
- Mindfully engage media by demonstrating attentiveness to what experiences media environments afford (media mindfulness)
- Holistically inventory media with the ecomedia wheel (systems literacy)

#### **Ecomedia Literacy Performance Indicators:**

- Create narratives of connection with digital storytelling tools
- Translate concepts between media and ecology disciplines using ecological metaphors to describe media phenomena
- Perform crossovers with ways of knowing through participant observation and social learning
- Develop an ethical framework in order act upon these understandings and to make wise choices

Based on Mary Catherine Bateson's model of education for global responsibility.

Bateson, M. C. (2007). Education for global responsibility. In S. C. Moser, & L. Dilling (Eds.), *Creating a climate for change: Communicating climate change and facilitating social change* (pp. 281-91). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### **Ecomedia Wheel**

**Ecomedia Wheel** is a heuristic for analyzing media within an ecosystem framework.

**Boundary object:** is an object with a commonly agreed upon identity but with different meanings according to its context.

**Worldview** (phenomenology): Media's impact on our perception of time, space and place.

**Ecology** (material conditions of media, environmental studies): The material conditions of media, including extraction, production, e-waste, energy and emissions.

**Culture** (hermeneutics, cultural studies, text analysis): Text and discourse analysis of media texts; mapping cultural behaviors and attitudes.

**Political Economy** (critical theory): Ideological structure of the global economics system, studying why designers design what they do.