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## Anytime, Anywhere Learning

### Media Literacy: Anytime, Anywhere Learning

The foundational skills of media literacy – the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with media in all its forms – provide the mindset to go with the headset that we are all so tethered to in a global media age.

As media production tools become easier and easier to use, as well as less and less expensive, all citizens have the opportunity to be media producers and consumers, and the long promise of media literacy is tantalizingly close. The boundaries of classrooms are beginning to soften; students' prior knowledge is more likely to be acknowledged and honored; the need to prepare students for lifelong learning – and to meet them where they are – all are indicative of a movement towards the type of pedagogy that media literacy fosters and delivers.

School structures are changing; school financing for public education is being examined and challenged so that access, equity and quality are more possible. Many new approaches are being piloted and tested in a world-wide movement toward imagining new forms of education, as the shift towards process skills and knowledge is rebalancing the traditional emphasis on content knowledge that is now available at the touch of a button.

According to new data published in May 2016 from the U.S. Department of Education's [National Center for Education Statistics](#), the nation's high school graduation rate hit 81 percent in 2012-13, the highest level since states adopted a new uniform way of calculating graduation rates five years ago. Yet this means that 19% of high school students dropped out. Clearly, the U.S. education system is still not working for many students, especially minorities and the poor, and this is true in other countries such as Brazil, where millions of students have no access or highly limited access to education, posing social and economic problems on a massive scale.

For media literacy to be a meaningful part of the education experience, the field must meet human resource challenges that begin with having trained teachers, schools of education that offer media literacy, licensing and quality assurance agencies that include media literacy in evaluating teachers and issuing credentials, and ongoing professional development that provides excellent media literacy education. Just using the words “media literacy” will never be enough.

This is not a new call to action! The Grunwald Document, dating back to a declaration of a UNESCO meeting representing 19 nations in 1982 (<http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/challenge-media-education-grunwald-document>) called for the following actions from policymakers and educators:

“We therefore call upon the competent authorities to:

- Initiate and support comprehensive media education programs — from pre-school to university level, and in adult education — the purpose of which is to develop the

knowledge, skills and attitudes which will encourage the growth of critical awareness and, consequently, of greater competence among users of electronic and print media. Ideally, such programs should include the analysis of media products, the use of media as a means of creative expression, and effective use of and participation in available media channels.

- Develop training courses for teachers and intermediaries both to increase their knowledge and understanding of the media and train them in appropriate teaching methods, which would take into account the already considerable but fragmented acquaintance with media already possessed by many students.
- Stimulate research and development activities for the benefit of media education, from such domains as psychology, sociology, and communication science.
- Support and strengthen the actions undertaken or envisaged by U.N.E.S.C.O. and which aim at encouraging international cooperation in media education.”

This list stands today as needed and necessary. The type of commitment and preparation necessary to deliver media literacy education is a challenge, indeed. CML offers three interviews with education entrepreneurs who are putting their hearts, their minds, their careers, their financial security, and their determination on the line to make a difference each and every day.

## Interview Highlights

### After School Programs

#### School on Wheels, Los Angeles, CA.

Catherine Meek, Executive Director

*Approximately 2.5 million children in the United States experience homelessness each year. That's one in every 30 children, one in every classroom, one too many. School on Wheels provides academic tutoring to children living in shelters, motels, cars, group foster homes and on the streets in Southern California – and anywhere, anytime learning is essential in reaching these children. School on Wheels provides homeless students stability in a time of stress and transition, and helps them achieve educational success so that they may break the cycle of homelessness and poverty. CML's Tessa Jolls interviewed Catherine Meek, School on Wheels Executive Director:*

Tessa (**TJ**): Let's talk about School on Wheels and the growth that you've been experiencing – serving 3500 children in six counties is really phenomenal.

Catherine (**CM**): School on Wheels was founded in 1993, and our mission is to enhance educational opportunities for homeless kids. We don't serve all homeless kids according to the "McKinney-Vento Act" definition; we serve the kids who are the most transient, those who live in shelters, motels, group foster homes, cars, campgrounds and on the street. McKinney-Vento covers kids who are doubled-up or tripled-up, that is, children who share the housing of others. We work with kids who move around all the time, those with the highest mobility among the homeless population. Because they move a lot, they miss a lot of school. And our goal is to shrink the gaps in their learning.

In fact, our research shows that every time a homeless family moves, the child loses about three months of academic learning. And the family typically will move at least three times a year. So they've lost an entire academic year right there. And what happens is that they fall further and further behind and the gaps becomes so wide that they give up. So, our intervention, our goal is to shrink the gaps in their learning and help them catch up.

We work in six counties in Southern California. We provide academic support, but it's also mentoring. We're an afterschool program; we're not a school and we don't employ teachers. So, for me we're probably more on the mentoring side than on the academic side, but our mission is truly about learning. We want children to focus on their number one job as children -- and that is to learn. The heart of our program is to work with our volunteer tutors, so they can provide the focused one-on-one educational support - week after week - to as many homeless children as possible.

We also provide anything else that helps them overcome barriers to their education. If you live on the street or even in a shelter, it's hard to keep all your paperwork and possessions. So we get

kids re-enrolled in school as quickly as possible. We provide them with brand new backpacks and school supplies. If they need uniforms and bus tokens, we give them those too. And we also provide scholarships for any kind of learning at all. Not just for college.

**TJ:** You're addressing that ecosystem of learning that has to happen...

**CM:** Yes, and in fact, I think we're successful if we can engender a love of learning no matter what that is. That to me is success. Homelessness has such a devastating impact on a kid's educational opportunity. It's just unbelievable. Our research shows that about 30% of students will attend three or more different schools in a single year. It's not just that they fall behind, but it's the social trauma that happens to them as well. They have to adjust to new environments, new curriculum, new teachers, new classmates, while still trying to learn. And just the loss of a home itself can be traumatic, leaving kids with just terrible, terrible feelings of loss and that impacts their social and academic well-being as well. And as you can imagine, it has significant impacts on their behavior.

**TJ:** These children must be in a fog. How can you focus, how can you learn when you have these overwhelming experiences coming down on you?

**CM:** Exactly, exactly. The behavioral and social problems interfere with learning at about three times the rate of other children. And the medical problems that they have are significant. I have been a tutor for 17 years, and so I've tutored a lot of kids over that time -- and I see the fear and anxiety that's with them all the time. And so that stress leads to major issues that kids don't get over easily. The impact of stress on their learning is very significant.

**TJ:** Yes. And then you can multiply that out to their health and to all of the other issues that are interfering in terms of their capacity for learning.

**CM:** Yes. I was reading a report recently, it's a survey, called, "Hidden in Plain Sight. Homeless Students in America's Public Schools." It talks about the toll homelessness takes on kids' lives and their health, their relationships and especially their education and over 80% of them say that being homeless had a huge impact on their life overall, including the ability to feel safe and secure and their mental, emotional, and physical health, and their self-esteem.

**TJ:** You've had a history of experience with these children, both as a mentor and as someone who's really trying to oversee the provision of all of these different services that they desperately need. What patterns do you see for success for mitigating some of these factors, if possible?

**CM:** Success is defined a little bit differently for us than what your readers are used to. We have students that have graduated from Harvard. We have students graduating from USC, UCLA -- we have all of those success stories. But based on my experience, because I'm so connected to these issues, we have other kinds of success, too.

One of the kids I tutored when I first started was a little six-year-old girl. I'd meet her in the Salvation Army homeless shelter. She had been so scarred by her life at that point that she wouldn't talk, she would sit under the table and wouldn't come out. I kept going every single week and I would sit under the table with her. I'd read books and talk to her, but she never responded. But she would kind of get interested in the books. And then one day, I came to the shelter and there she was, waiting for me at the table. So I consider that a success.

**TJ:** Absolutely.

**CM:** Did it help her academically? I don't know, because she was so scarred. But I know my consistency in being there every week, just for her, helped her in many other ways. Getting a kid to go to school is success. Getting her to hand in her homework, that's success. Getting her to complete assignments, that's success. So there are a lot of different definitions of success.

**TJ:** Yes. It reminds me of working at Leo Politi Elementary School (link to Project SMARTArt) in Los Angeles which is in the Pico Union district. There were many, many immigrant children who didn't have English language skills. They had students who were in the special education programs. We had a couple of special education teachers in our program; we were at the school for three years. And I remember one of the special ed teachers saying to me, "We really have to look at success differently here." The fact that she was teaching some of her students to be able to introduce themselves: to know to say their names, to hold out their hands, to smile. You're in a situation where, not in all cases, but in some cases, the children have limited capacity for whatever reason. Or in other cases, they have terrific capacity but they have some emotional barriers or social barriers.

**CM:** Right.

**TJ:** The point is that success is very different. And there are so many things that we all take for granted, we who are just regular citizens who are lucky to have homes and good family relations.

**CM:** That's right. Part of the homeless population as a whole has decreased slightly, but the rate of family homelessness has just skyrocketed. So, we are addressing veteran homelessness and chronic homelessness, which is helpful, but we're not even acknowledging the fact that we have about 2.5 million kids in America who are homeless. Kids -- not families -- kids.

In California, there are over half a million children who are without a home, half a million! And we don't acknowledge that. I think we're ashamed of it. We can't acknowledge it because it would be shameful to acknowledge that we have kids living on the street.

**TJ:** Yes. That's right. Especially when we like to think that, "Oh, well, we have programs to address. We have people to help, the government is there." In a way, we "outsource" our concerns, yet these are our fellow human beings.

**CM:** Right, right. LA is the homeless capital of world, as you probably know.

**TJ:** This is shameful too, and for the media it becomes something that it's not "new". It's not exciting. It's chronic. And the media isn't interested in chronic.

**CM:** That's right. It's easier to write about homeless drug addicts because you can blame it in them -- it's their own fault. But how can you blame a 6-year old for not having a home? Unfortunately, criminalizing homelessness is increasing. There was a report from the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty that showed that although most cities don't provide shelter, almost half of them make it a crime to sleep in a vehicle! How can you tell that 6-year old she is a criminal? (Although the LA Times just last Thanksgiving, did a feature story about [School on Wheels and our kids in skid row](#)).

Part of our mission is to go where the kids are because transportation is a huge issue. So we can't expect them to come to us, and we're not brick and mortar based at all. We do have a Learning Center right in skid row and that's because there are so many kids in one concentrated space. We have a Center there with about 30 to 35 kids who come every day after school. But for the most part, for the rest of the students, over 3,000 of them, we go to where they are. That means we meet them at a shelter or it could be a library or even a bookstore, or somewhere where they can get easily. Some schools allow us to tutor onsite. I would like to have more partnerships with schools so we can actually work with the students in their school setting. That would be ideal.

**TJ:** Yes, you have to really meet the children where they are physically, emotionally, mentally... It goes well beyond the bricks and mortar in the sense that you start with the child.

**CM:** Right. That's exactly right. And we have to meet them in their own space. Part of our success is that in their lives, which are completely chaotic and unstable, we are consistent stable adults who are there every week just for them, not for anyone else, just for them. Sometimes the tutors -- and again, our focus and our mission is academic -- but sometimes our tutors just sit and listen to the student, listen to what the child has to say. Because it may be that they're so overwhelmed with something else, with the stress of life that they just need to talk to someone. And I think that consistency and stability are really part of our success. We don't give up.

Our volunteers are the heart of the program. We just couldn't exist without volunteers. And they come from all walks of life. I'm in total awe of our volunteers, they're remarkable people. Especially, in SoCal, where commuting is such a hassle. They sometimes drive over an hour just to meet their student. We have tutors who are rocket scientists, literally, rocket scientists. We have actors, lawyers, college students, nurses, we have a special initiative to target seniors or people over 55 who are remarkable volunteers because they tend to stay with us longer. That's good for the student, since the longer the student and volunteer bond exists, the better it is for the student and for the volunteer. We have a very lengthy application process for volunteers. And because we need our volunteers to stay with us, retention is very important. We need applicants

to understand this is not your typical volunteer opportunity. It's a very difficult situation. So we actually spend about eight hours of training before a volunteer is matched up with a student. They go through background checks, and fingerprinting. They have to watch pre-application videos to set their expectations and we give them the opportunity to say, "I don't think this is the right opportunity for me." We don't want people to come and stay for a month or so. That's the worst thing that can happen to a child. And so we try to set expectations appropriately. We provide all the training. You don't have to be a teacher, although we have a lot of teachers in our volunteer groups, but we do all the training ourselves. It doesn't always work, you know.

**TJ:** It's very challenging, the commitment. And also it's difficult to meet a child where he or she "is." That's difficult with your own children, much less a child you really don't know.

**CM:** That's right. And that's part of the issue as well. These kids have absolutely no control over their lives. What happens is that a volunteer gets discouraged because they'll show up and the kid is gone. Or the student, for whatever reason, hasn't been able to get to the library. Education is not always at the top of a mother's list. She's in survival mode; she's looking at "Where am I going to sleep tonight?" And so we need a special kind of volunteer and we try to make sure that those expectations are set up front. It's a difficult situation, but we are fortunate in the volunteers that we do have.

What we are trying to impart to the student is a love of learning. You're not their school teacher, you're not a parent, you're not a disciplinarian. You are there for the child. That's the only reason you are there. If you can help them academically, that's almost a bonus. But you are there to be a mentor, a buddy, just a consistent presence. We don't want you to volunteer with us if you're just going to do it whenever you like. You have to be there every week. That's the most important criterion.

And we do have "contracts" or agreements -- with the parents, the student and the volunteer tutor. At the first session, where we match up the volunteer and the student, the parent/guardian, the volunteer and the student sit down with one of our paid staff to go over what the expectations are for everyone. We make sure all the parties involved understand what is expected from them.

Additionally, we do continual training and surveys. We do parent, student and volunteer surveys. We have a volunteer and a student council I work with, comprised of selected volunteers and students within the various regions. We want to make sure our program is meeting their needs, and we also address how can we improve our efforts. We review all of the major program initiatives that we might be starting and get feedback from them. And then, on our scholarship committee, we have a volunteer representative and a student representative as well.

**TJ:** Are you currently tutoring any children, Catherine?

**CM:** The boy I am tutoring now is 13. His mother has three kids, including the child I work with. They live in shelters or vouchered motels, and the mom works from two in the morning until nine



in the morning, stocking shelves at a 99 cent store. I have a great relationship with the mom, who is dedicated to her kids and getting them a good education. But it's a very difficult life. Very tough.

**TJ:** What kinds of needs have you seen as consistent over time?

**CM:** About ten years ago, when we were much smaller, the needs tended to be a bit different because we were solely focused on the academic side. As we started to grow, we saw that the behavioral side and what we call character strengths came into play more and more. And we understood that we were not just there to help with homework or to reduce the education gaps, but we were really there to mentor and to help the kids through the situations that they found themselves in. And so part of our program is to embed these character strengths -- things like resilience and grit and optimism and we try to include them in our program. Starting 2013, we introduced a digital learning initiative and that's been a significant factor in the recent past, because not only are our students falling further and further behind academically, but in the 21st century, they are so far behind technologically.

Part of the challenge is that not only do they not have hardware, but a lot of the shelters don't even have internet access. We've now started creating digital learning centers. So we will ask for a room or a space at a shelter -- these have to be big shelters in order to do that -- and then we'll come in and we will redo it into a digital learning center, including infrastructure, painting, furniture and whatever has to be done, as well as the hardware, the software and we will pay for internet services as well.

We've found that getting technology to homeless students is very tough. And in today's digital age, they're not going to survive if they don't have those skills. Nationwide, a quarter of students in grades three to five and nearly a third of students in grade six through 12 use some kind of a mobile device provided by their school to support schoolwork. But these numbers fall drastically in Title I schools and amongst homeless students, they're almost non-existent. So, again, these homeless children are falling further and further behind the learning curves. And yet they're the ones that can benefit most from these technology tools. Because they are so mobile, to have mobile learning is really important.

**TJ:** That is so interesting for a lot of reasons. But, one that stands out for me is that the children can sometimes be resistant to using the technology tools.

**CM:** I think it's fear -- fear of the unknown. There's so much unknown, and they don't have the practice tools and their parents/guardians certainly don't have the tools or skills either. And so it's like learning anything new; but once they learn, I mean the students that use our digital learning centers... It's dramatic, truly transforming. You can see it working immediately. And they're so interested, and they want to explore.

**TJ:** Absolutely. And I know with our work, one of the things we need to develop is curriculum that works on a handheld.

**CM:** One key we've found is learner-centered instruction where students can work at their own pace, on their own time, to address their specific issues. Since our students are so far behind in many cases, the adaptive learning software and programs that we use are focused on the types of students that we serve. Maybe you're in grade five, but your learning ability is at grade three, so the software adapts to that, and then works with you at your level. They don't have to be in a brick and mortar place to learn. They can learn anywhere, anytime. We were just awarded a grant to address basic digital literacy, as well as hard skills such as typing. A big part of the grant is going to be coding. We're going to work in partnership with a couple of coding organizations and then we are going to help students learn to code.

**TJ:** Yes, coding is a new form of reading and writing. We see it, in media literacy, as being able to use another creative language with its own rules (Core Concept #2). And also, with coding the kids can acquire a new skill that's extremely valuable if you have some kids who are really proficient.

**CM:** Yes. We work with a lot of group foster homes. These are kids that for one reason or the other have been taken from their family. They're not in individual foster homes but they're residential group homes, some of them the worst imaginable. Some of these youth have been involved in the legal system. And then they're put into these group homes, and they have no skills or limited skills. We're trying to teach them how to use a computer, how to use the internet. And then, we get to the next level, we teach them how to use Photoshop and Office and so on. And so coding is the next step...

Our digital learning initiative is made up of two major parts. One is to work with adaptive learning software and the other one is online tutoring. We have volunteers all over the country. They can work online with students and we have a platform which was developed by one of our partners, so students can work with a tutor who may be 3,000 miles away. That also opens up interesting avenues for the kid, knowing that she's working with somebody 3,000 miles away – we have tutors in about 10 states, including in Alaska, Pennsylvania, as well as Puerto Rico. It becomes a cultural exchange.

But on the coding side, we're going to work with a couple of non-profit organizations, such as code.org and Coding for Treasure. Code.org estimates that there are over half a million computing jobs in the US, and yet fewer than 50,000 computer science students graduated last year. So there's this huge need for computing jobs. And that's what we're going to focus on for some of these students to get them some hard skills.

**TJ:** Yes, it's a different world, where smart phones are our major tools.

**CM:** Yes, yet education has changed so little in 100 years. It's amazing we still expect kids to go and sit in classrooms at a certain time and day, and stop at a certain time of the day, and that's how you are supposed to learn.

**TJ:** Some of the ways that you reach children through School On Wheels is pertinent to all children today. I'm hearing some really profound lessons, such as how learning is an outcome of caring for the whole child.

**CM:** Right. As we said earlier, how can children learn if they are in survival mode? We have to take care of the whole child, including their social, psychological, behavioral issues, as well as learning modes. We've tried for years and years to measure outcomes. We've worked with major universities in Southern California to develop outcomes, and they just throw up their hands, because we start a control group with 100 kids and then at the end of the period, they're all gone. So it's very, very tough for us to measure outcomes. We have self-efficacy surveys and so on, but with adaptive software, we can finally start to measure academic growth. That's one of the great things about digital learning, we can start to measure some of those outcomes that we have never been able to measure before.

**TJ:** And as you said, there are lots of outcomes. What are some other examples?

**CM:** We have a lot of students who come back and volunteer with us, which is very gratifying. One of my favorite students was just elected to our Board.

**TJ:** That's success. Congratulations to all!

**CM:** We're really trying to change two lives. The student's life of course, but we also change the volunteers' lives. We've had volunteers who've changed careers because of being tutors at School on Wheels. As a volunteer myself, I know that I've been educated a lot more through this process than ever before. So it's an educational process for all of us, not just for our students. And it can have a long lasting impact on a child's life and on a volunteer's life, for sure.

## Charter Schools

### **Ace Preparatory Academy, Indianapolis, IN**

Anna Schults, Founder & Head of School

*ACE Preparatory Academy ([acepreacademy.org](http://acepreacademy.org)) is a new charter school on the Northeast side of Indianapolis, founded in August of 2016 by Anna Schults, Founder & Head of School, and an Indiana Teacher of the Year. Offering kindergarten and first grade classes, Ace Prep is dedicated to providing the foundation needed for children to be successful academically and in life. Through this interview, Anna Schults shares her insights into starting up a new public education institution:*

**AS:** Nobody on this planet understands the depth of the mission and vision as well as you do as a founder. If this work was easy, we'd have awesome schools across our country -- and we don't have all awesome schools across our country.

I'm not a proponent of charter schools over other type of schools. I'm just a proponent that every

child needs to go to a damn good school. I believe that an amazing free public education is a basic human right. So because charter schools are public schools, that's the path I went down. I am so humbled and honored that these families hand me their children for eight hours a day and they trust us.

As an educator, your mind goes to what happens in the classroom, be it from a human resources perspective or a child perspective or just the resources-in-the-classroom perspective. Then it's things like, we need to learn how to write a teacher's contract. We need to learn how to recruit the staff. So the domino effect of that is massive.

As a whole, it's important for folks to realize that charter legislation is isolated state by state. What happens in Indiana does not mirror what has to happen in California, but there are basic tenets about charter schools that ring true regardless of the state or the polices and that is, charter schools are free. Always free.

Charter schools are public and charter schools are non-religious schools. We cannot put forth a curriculum that mirrors what students would receive in a private religious-based school. Every charter school, by law, has to admit every single scholar that applies as long as you serve the grade levels that that scholar needs. Yes, there are waiting lists and so on, but the point is, if we are a K and 1 school and if there's a student who is 50 miles away from our school wanting to enroll in kindergarten, we have to take that student.

Charter schools are also their own school district. You think about everything that happens at a traditional central office of a school district... All of that happens in-house here and we have a staff of 5 total, including teachers. It's just all hands on-deck, all the time, and you have to have a deep understanding of what legislation within your state says in terms of what a charter school is and isn't. You must always operate under the mindset that you are compliant.

Charter schools are under a lot of scrutiny and I say, rightly so. Each authorizer within the state grants a charter school for a certain amount of time. Our school is authorized for five years, which is pretty standard. The language with charters always offers more autonomy, which allows, for example, media literacy conversation to bubble up greater than it might in a traditional public school district, but for a higher level of accountability. There are many that don't appreciate that accountability. They view it as big brother "is watching" or how dare you question what we're doing here. My take has always been, bring it on.

Nobody wants to be perpetuating a learning environment or a fiscal situation that is not healthy or strong. We don't profess to have all the answers. So be it: eyeballs from the state, or eyes from our authorizer, or eyes from community members that might be vocal against charter schools -- those things make us stronger.

An ability to lead a charter school is much more than, "Oh, I really like kids and I love to teach," and, "I really like this one particular thematic unit and I want everybody to do this." A deep amount

of policy knowledge, and legislative knowledge, and understanding of what the accountability is within your state -- what are the goals, what are the milestones, what are the timelines that you need to operate under -- is crucial to your ability to design a school the way you want to.

So I tell people all the time, this isn't about the latest fad. This is about what we know works well, based on a body of research. For us, we hang our hats a lot on foundational reading skills and a massive responsibility to develop a culture of strong readers. Media literacy would play into that, of course.

Ultimately, our effort is about instilling within kids the character that they need to be strong citizens and building within them the skillsets that they need for doors to open.

Teachers, then, need a solid platform to build upon, and the benchmarks and targets we have for our teachers are super high when it comes to mastery of content for kids. Sometimes they look at me like, "Are you sure this is the target?" I always say, "Of course. Which child do you want to point to in your class that you're not going to teach, because you don't think they can meet that target?"

Every state has a different timeline for their application cycle. Before we were authorized, I spent two years designing the school to actually get to a place where I felt comfortable and confident that we could stand behind the words on a piece of paper. I toured the country identifying strong charter school as part of a larger fellowship program called Building Excellent Schools, that puts you through a very intense in-depth year fellowship program where we studied every aspect of school design in order to launch a strong school from day one.

With charter schools, people tend to view the charter purely from a lens of, "I have a model and this is what we're going to do," and they have the best of intentions, but they lose sight of the fact that in order for your school to be successful, you have to have students and families to populate your building. Charter schools are a choice. The amount of time and energy that we put forth towards outreach, and recruitment and community engagement, and marketing, and advertising is much more than a fulltime job.

Building community awareness is, to me, the number one reason why time to launch is so important. If you don't have buy-in from the local community, you don't have a school.

When it comes to the educators that I'm putting before your son, or daughter, my responsibility is to find the best of the best. There are hundreds of thousands of educators on this planet and I need to find five rock stars. While there are rock stars within the zip code of our school, there're also rock stars in Tennessee, and in California and in New York. My job is to find them.

My job is also to identify people and organizations within the community who share our mission and vision, or who believe in our mission and vision and want to help us propel it forward. That includes, for example, a pastor of a local church saying to me that he would start a before and after school program, so that our families have an affordable option of where to send their

scholars before and after our day, that aligns with their schedule.

There is no charter school 101 roadmap. As a one-school school district, we are on our own little island. The State of Indiana does not have a formal charter school association and so there is no formalized network for charter school leaders to get together to help make each other better. We've found informal ways to do that, and there are some great organizations that have popped up recently that help leaders of all different schools be successful at who they are and what they do; but charter schools in some states are a very contentious piece of the education landscape. I'm fortunate that in Indiana they're pretty neutral.

When people look at us and say, "Great, prove it," I think that's what they should be saying. Just because you have this awesome idea, you can't expect that everybody is going to rally around it.

If I had to do it all over again, my community outreach to organizations that don't have anything to do with education, would have been greater so that I had a toolbox of services that I could highlight to families, or refer to families. As you build relationships with these families and they become a part of who you are as a school, the issues become much bigger than where the children go to school.

As a founder of any organization, you are driven by a mission and a vision, and you are now in a community or in a situation where you hear from vendors who want to become a part of that mission and vision. How do you protect that vision and mission -- and seriously protect it -- when you are being enticed by a whole sort of bells and whistles. That mission creep can be real, and it's important to be strong enough and alert enough to realize it, and to surround yourself with other people whom you know will protect it.

If we do this right, we are helping to end three generations of educational poverty. We're changing the conversations that parents are having around their kitchen table. We are obviously impacting the lives of the scholars that we are blessed to serve, and then we are graduating students who have been instilled with this mentality that college begins in kindergarten. They know what it means to work hard and to be good people, and that will impact their children in those next generations. This is generational educational poverty that we're trying to curb. Those conversations take time and are hard, but that gets to changing the game for families as much as those who are in our classrooms.

Starting a charter school is challenging, indeed, yet the number of charter schools is growing every year. In the Los Angeles Unified School District alone, since approval of its first charter school in 1993, LAUSD has become the largest district charter school authorizer in the nation, with about 250 independent and affiliated charter schools serving over 130,000 students. As stated in the Board of Education's Policy on Charter School Authorizing, "Charter schools are valuable partners and viable choices among the District's robust set of educational options. Accordingly, the Board of Education views charter schools as an integral method of achieving its vision and mission."

## Da Vinci Schools, Southern California

Matthew Wunder, Chief Executive Officer

Nathan Barrymore, Communications Principal

*Established in 2009, Da Vinci Schools are independently governed and operated charter schools serving the Southern California community and children from more than 80 zip codes. RISE High, incubated at Da Vinci Schools, won a \$10 million 'Super School' Grant in 2016 to start a school for homeless, foster youth, and other diverse learners through The Super School Project, a national competition to reimagine high school funded by Laurene Powell Jobs, the widow of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs. Tessa Jolls interviewed Matthew Wunder, Chief Executive Officer, and Nathan Barrymore, Da Vinci Communications Principal.*

**Tessa Jolls:** What makes Da Vinci Schools unique?

**Nathan Barrymore:** That comes through in a couple of ways in our schools. First, our projects and curricula all start with a goal of essential skills which we want students to master. This is not all that different than a standards-based curriculum you may see in other schools.

We also want our students to be comfortable interacting in professional environments and seeing the wide world of professional opportunities. There is a mindset, which comes from professional development, that calls for seeing this professional interaction done well, happening across schools and across classrooms. Then, there is a logistics component, which takes a lot of effort, just a lot of man hours to actually connect with and talk to industry in ways that are useful for kids.

At Da Vinci schools, the logistics are complicated, because the curricula is co-designed by industry, and these courses are delivered in partnership with industry.

**Tessa:** How about an example that would illustrate how you bring all of these arenas into play with students? And then, please give us an example of what you see as some of the outcomes from teaching the 21st century skills.

**Nathan:** OK, let's start with the outcomes and work all the way back to how we get started. Right now, our students are working on their final presentation, demonstrating their learning for a strategic communications course where they have designed a public awareness campaign around an issue of their choice -- either affecting campus or outside of campus -- which is a project that you could probably say many schools are doing, so how is ours different?

This is probably a six-week project. The students have been working alongside professionals at 72andSunny, which is a modern communications firm. Our teacher is also hired from industry, so our teacher has three years or four years' experience working for a PR firm in L.A.; also, she worked internationally for a non-profit doing communications work.

For the last six weeks, students have gone on two trips to the 72andSunny offices and presented

their work there, gotten feedback and then, communications professionals from 72andSunny came into our school two or three times and critiqued student work. Students gave their final pitch with slides being timed and changed after every 10 seconds, with a total of six minutes being allowed. That's an approach used in the architecture world -- we had no idea about it here at school – but It made every student a better presenter because he or she gained some ideas from industry. In the meanwhile, the presentation was being reviewed by a panel, including staff from 72andSunny, as well as teachers and administrators from the school. So all the students got that experience of having at least a half dozen touch points with professionals in the field, besides their daily touch points with the teacher, who is also a professional.

**Tessa:** You mentioned assessments, so I'm assuming that the students had some goals to shoot toward from the very beginning. With project based learning, it's important to structure the assignment so that when the project is done, there is feedback and assessment by people who have a specific expertise.

**Nathan:** Yes, and the perspectives build over time. All those details about your PowerPoint presentation having too many words or not having interesting backgrounds or having clashing colors -- those are things that we address freshman year, when students give their first presentations. But now, as juniors and seniors working with industry, all the feedback and effort of a teacher is to ask questions: do you have a good idea to address the problem? Is your problem well-defined? Is your social action plan the right move for this sort of issue? It's all these much higher level questions that we're focusing on by the time they're juniors and seniors.

For us, a foundational text is Ron Berger's *Ethic of Excellence*. That's probably the closest thing we have to a well-defined framework. We've also worked with the Buck Institute.

**Matt Wunder:** The communications school under Nathan's leadership won a next-generation learning challenge grant that was funded by the Gates Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation, and it was a very sizable donation and match. Our corporate and professional partners stepped up to provide that match. It was our third high school. It was centered around innovative models that leverage technology, but also various programs and services. It was more complementary to our science and design high schools, which are college prep schools and the curricula offers A-G courses and all are project based. There are a variety of signature practices that you can scan on the website; but, essentially they're different in flavor depending upon the professional partners, the complement of different seminars kids can engage in, with some overlap for sure, and to some degree, they are influenced by the projects that students do.

In science, it's engineering and biomed; in design it's architecture and graphic arts. There's a very large product design component. For communications, it is new age journalism or media literacy.

Da Vinci has a model that we think works really well for kids and honors them and connects them to the idea that what you learn in school needs to help you when you get out of school.





**NAMLE Meritorious Service Award re-named in honor of Elizabeth Thoman**

In 2003, NAMLE (then AMLA) Board created the Meritorious Service Award "to be given to individuals or projects that have significantly contributed to the growth and quality of the field of media literacy."

This year, NAMLE is changing the name of the award in honor of Elizabeth Thoman, founding board member of NAMLE. Liz also founded the Center for Media Literacy and was a leading voice in the American media literacy movement during her life. Liz passed away in December 2016.



The Northeast Media Literacy Conference held February 4, 2017 at Central Connecticut State University included a panel honoring the life and leadership of Elizabeth Thoman.

**CONSORTIUM**  
for **MEDIA LITERACY**

*Uniting for Development*

**About Us...**

The Consortium for Media Literacy addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents.

The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth. <http://consortiumformedia literacy.org>

## Media Literacy Resources

### Resources for Anytime, Anywhere Learning

The Center for Media Literacy has long been a leader in providing curricula which is project-based and action-oriented, in line with its Empowerment Spiral framework of Awareness, Analysis, Reflection and Action. It is through such curricula that connections to every-day life, lifelong learning skills, and life beyond the classroom are made, with media literacy being the pedagogy and conduit through which students acquire content knowledge, change attitudes, and change behaviors.

#### [Media Literacy: A System for Learning Anytime, Anywhere](#)

CML's Trilogy contains Change Management, Deconstruction, and Construction Tools.

#### [Breakfast Epiphanies: Project-Based Learning Through Media Literacy and Nutrition](#) \*

Middle School Curriculum on Media Literacy and Nutrition.

#### [Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media](#) \*

Middle School Curriculum on Media Literacy and Violence in Media.

Find the published longitudinal evaluation study here:

<http://www.medialit.org/sites/default/files/Injury%20Prevention%20Journal%202013.pdf> .

#### [Smoke Detectors! Deconstructing Tobacco Use in Media](#) \*

Middle and High School Curriculum on Smoking Cessation.

#### [A Recipe for Action: Deconstructing Food Advertising](#) \*

Middle School Curriculum on Media Literacy and Nutrition.

\*These health-oriented media literacy curricula are rated as “high quality curriculum” for both afterschool and inschool by the [California Healthy Kids Clearinghouse](#) and the [CASRC library](#).

[Teaching Democracy](#) provides a media literacy approach to the subject.

[Project SMARTArt](#) is a Case Study in Elementary School Media Literacy and Arts Education.

We invite you to visit [medialit.com](http://medialit.com) to find research, articles, activities, and professional development materials for teaching media literacy skills.

## Med!aLit Moments

### Did you see what I saw?

We all experience the same events differently and therefore we report on them differently, too. In this exercise, students will observe an event and then discuss their different choices for reporting what happened. In the end, the class will view a videotape of the event to see if their reports stuck to the facts, or if they included personal bias and opinion.

**AHA!:** There's a difference between fact and opinion.

**Grade Level:** 6-9

**Key Question #1:** Who created this message?

**Core Concept #1:** All media messages are constructed.

**Key Question #3:** How might different people understand this message differently?

**Core Concept #3:** Different people experience the same media message differently.

**Materials:** Cell phone or video camera for filming, and ability to project video onto large screen.

**Activity:** Before defining fact or opinion, ask three students to participate in a role-play scenario in front of the class. Only the three participants will know what's happening. One of the participants will quietly film the role-play using a smart phone or video camera. Have one student sit at a desk reading a book with a set of keys on the floor next to his/her chair. Do not have the student place the keys – the instructor should set the scene before the students arrive at class. Another student will walk in, pick up the keys and continue walking out of the room without any interaction between the two students. That's it. Stop filming.

The remainder of the students play the role of news reporters. Ask them to spend a few minutes writing a headline and 2 or 3 sentences about what they just observed. Ask several students to share their headlines and text with the class. Then define fact and opinion:

**Fact** is something known with certainty that can be objectively verified. A journalist covering a news story is sent out to gather facts – who, what, where, when. The journalist is not meant to add his/her own meaning to the facts but rather to write down or broadcast everything they see in great detail. Facts are descriptive in nature and can be supported by evidence.

**Opinion** is a belief or conclusion not necessarily substantiated by positive knowledge or proof. This is where the person relaying the story guesses, speculates, or fabricates the details about what happened by interjecting his or her own interpretations or judgments. (Strongly held preconceived opinions are referred to as **bias**).

Next, show the video just recorded by the student (without commentary), to remind your class of what they actually observed. Help your students identify where they intermingled their own opinions with the facts. Why did they include opinions? Did anyone write that the keys were lost or stolen? That the individuals were good, bad or misguided? That the student left with the keys to go somewhere specific? Explain how personal bias, past experience, stereotypes, or a desire to sensationalize contribute to the blurring of lines. Discuss the consequences of presenting opinion as fact. Does it matter? Do you care? Why?

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, ©2002-2017.