RENEE HOBBS

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INTERVIEWED BY: TESSA JOLLS

(Quote)

> *A young scholar who is really interested in media literacy -- the big question for them is, what discipline do they enter in: is it communication, education, public health, sociology, writing/rhetoric or some other field? We don't have an answer for that, because none of those shoes exactly fit. Some part of all those shoes fit. I hope to solve that problem in my lifetime: I would really love to have an opportunity to create a cross-disciplinary, or interdisciplinary program where the disciplinary silos don't have to interfere with the quality of scholarship for media literacy. Until we can have truly interdisciplinary programs that connect English education to education to literary studies to sociology to media and communication, until you can actually study that all of a piece, then the scholarship of media literacy is going to continue to be at the margins. I hope I can get to develop this new kind of program someday…*

BIOGRAPHY OF RENEE HOBBS

Renee Hobbs is an American educator, scholar and advocate for media literacy education. She is Professor in the Department of Broadcasting, Telecommunications and Mass Media at Temple University School of Communications and Theater, where she founded the Media Education Lab. She is co-editor with Amy Jensen of the *Journal of Media Literacy Education*.

INTERVIEW TEXT

Selected Questions:

Why did you become involved in media education?

Can you tell me about what shaped the field and your practice?

What were the surprises for you along the way?

TJ: *Why did you become involved in media education?*

RH: When I was an undergraduate at the University of Michigan in the 1970s I was an English literature major. At that time we were reading Shakespeare and John Donne, Emily Dickinson, and Chaucer, and I remember very vividly thinking that these very powerful literary techniques that I'm learning to use would be productively applied to shows like *Gilligan's Island* and *I Love Lucy*. At that time, there didn't exist the serious study of popular culture but I remember thinking it would be so cool to do. And I didn't know exactly how to go about doing that. I thought, well I can go into journalism, and so I worked as a college reporter and editor for the *Michigan Daily* for three years. I realized I was fascinated with how news works, how news is constructed. I learned how powerful, in a strange way, the student newspaper actually was at that time. But nobody at the student newspaper was interested in

reflecting on that. They were just on to the next story. I really wanted to think about and talk about how the news is made and how making the news shapes the world. At the same time, I also loved film, thanks to my two best film professors: Hugh Cohen, who really taught me how to write, and Herb Eagle, who had just written a book on Russian formalist film theory and whose ideas about film structure influenced my thinking about semiotics, helping me see the deep mystery at the heart of montage, interpretation and meaning in a social and political context.

And then my senior year of undergrad I took a class with Barbra Morris, who was a remarkable rhetoric/composition professor at Michigan. She was teaching media literacy even without using the term, as I recall. She had us analyze a wide range of film and television genres and create short videos to write reflectively on our strategic choices as authors. I also took a media and children class with John Murray who was visiting the University of Michigan from Kansas State University, where he was directing a media violence initiative. He was in charge of the Boys Town Center for the Study of Youth Development and had a big media violence initiative. And as a humanist, I got incredibly fascinated with the idea of social science and the process of measuring media's impact on behavior, and so I got a masters degree at Michigan in communication to learn more about media effects research.

That introduced me to this really interesting Israeli psychologist named Gabriel Salomon, a joyful man full of life and heart and imagination. And he was visiting that year in Michigan, too. He was an educational psychologist at Hebrew University; he had just written a book called *Interaction of Media Cognition and Learning*, and that was in 1979. That book rocked my world! That book basically said that Israeli kids seem to learn more from television than American kids, because Israeli kids had just gotten television, and there was only one channel. Kids put in more mental effort when watching, and therefore they learned more from it. He realized that the more effort you put in, the more value you get out, which seemed completely right about everything in life, really. He introduced me to the work of Howard Gardner, who in the '70s had written a book called *Artful Scribbles* and was doing all this stuff studying human creativity at Harvard Graduate School of Education. I started looking at his work and he and his grad students were looking at understanding how kids understood different TV genres, how they came to understand advertising, at the difference between cartoons and live action, and I thought hmm, that is cool.

So that's what took me to Harvard. Now once I got there I had the great opportunity to work with David Perkins and Howard Gardner and to be at Project Zero and to work on some projects because in the early '80s, first generation of microcomputers was coming out, and big set of questions were going on in the field as technology education shifted from the television to the microcomputer. I had come to Harvard in part because of Gerald Lesser's pioneering work in children and television (he was one of the co-founders of Sesame Street) and I loved his high-level boundary-crossing at the intersection of research and practice. And at some point, I discovered media literacy somewhere stumbling around in the library. I saw that Fr. John Culkin (friend of Marshall McLuhan) had written this interesting dissertation on film study in the high school, while he was at Harvard Ed School back in 1964, basically saying that we need to teach kids about film and media. He's famous for the quote: "Kids with still and motion picture cameras, kids with audio and video recorders, are more fun than other kids." And when I went to my advisor Gerald Lesser to say I wanted to write my dissertation on media literacy, he said "No way! No way! No way! Teaching kids about camera angles is ridiculous, find another topic." Basically his argument was there was not enough literature to build upon, and so therefore I wouldn't be able to write a good dissertation and contribute new knowledge to the field. But that was pretty depressing. So instead I went back to my interest in news and journalism and I conducted an experiment to explore how various forms of television editing could, depending on the type of editing, help people to better comprehend and remember the content of TV news.

After I got the degree, I was hired as an assistant professor of communication at Babson College in 1985. Within the first year or two I found myself at the Boston Film Video Foundation for an event which brought together media artists, K-12 teachers and college professors to talk about media in society. I remember being bored with the superficial blather throughout the whole event, at some point I got up on my high horse and said, "I'm teaching my college juniors and seniors about the First Amendment and the difference between broadcast and cable television and about the economics of the media and how advertising supports what we see on broadcast television and how radio waves work…I'm teaching this stuff to kids who are 20 and 21, 22 years old, they're finance and accounting majors, and you know what? I could just as easily teach the same stuff to 7th graders."

Somebody came up to me after and tapped me on my shoulder and said, "You really think you can teach this stuff to 7th graders?" I said, "ABSOLUTELY!" That was Anne Marie Stein, and she was the executive director for the Boston Film Video Foundation. We talked, we drank coffee, and we wrote a grant, funded by the Andy Warhol Foundation. At that time, Branda Miller, an experimental video artist teaching at Rensselaer Polytechnic, was exploring youth media, too, and so we collaborated on a curriculum. With Tim Wright, a terrific video artist, we went into the Taft Middle School in Boston, a really grimy, deeply troubled school. I worked for three years, in 6th, 7th and 8th grade classrooms. Working with these kids was where I made a lot of mistakes and, in the process, I really learned how to teach. I experimented. I discovered right quick that it wasn't about stuffing knowledge into their heads. It was a form of consciousness-raising and that required creating a meaningful learning environment to activate intellectual curiosity and a sense of personal agency. Kids did critical analysis activities where we deconstructed different kinds of TV shows, news and advertising. We did production activities where kids made all kinds of narrative stories and public service announcements, little documentaries. Those three years were incredibly important for me trying to figure out how to engage 6th 7th and 8th graders and how to *connect with their experience with media and popular culture*. I also learned a little about how to manage the impossibilities of an urban public school that feels like a prison for these kids who were only 11, 12, 13 years old. I knew then that there were enough messy complexities in this work to last a lifetime – I got bitten by the media literacy bug.

TJ: Once you see it in action like that, and really see that you can get those results with 7th graders, it's pretty amazing. Now, okay maybe the best thing to do is just keep on going…

RH: Yikes, we could be talking all day though! During this time, I think I went deep into babyland… Roger was born in '88, Rachel was born in '89 (Hobbs' son and daughter). When I was raising my children, I was exploring another kind of media literacy watching them use media and technology – they were my informal research subjects, of course. But I was still trying to get tenure, so I wasn't publishing on media literacy in that period, in part because I was having trouble getting the Taft Middle School work that I was doing into publication. It didn't really fit into communication and it really didn't fit in education. So I kind of regrouped and said, to get tenure I need publications, and to get publications, something big and splashy would be good. So basically I went back to the issues I was exploring during my PhD thesis, which was looking at television editing, montage, image-sound relationships, and how this affects people's interpretation processes.

Thanks to help from my colleagues John Stauffer and Richard Frost, we were able to go to Northwest Kenya to explore a research question that had intrigued me for years. My ideas on visual literacy were deeply inflected by my undergraduate work in film/video studies at Michigan. I had a course with

Rudolf Arnheim, a very influential German film theorist who was teaching at the University of Michigan when I was an undergraduate. In 1932 (yes, that's 1932!) he wrote a book called *Film As Art*, where he claimed that people needed to "learn" to "read the grammar of film." I was always intrigued by perceptual psychology and wondered if this was true or not. When John Stauffer told me about the opportunity to work with a group of tribal people, it struck me that it might be possible to test Arnheim's idea experimentally. We had a connection with a missionary who worked with the Pokot, a large group of nomadic tribespeople in Northwest Kenya. Most had never seen photographs, film or television before. So off we went to the middle of the most remote part of Kenya you can possibly imagine -- with a jeep, a generator and some portable video editing equipment. We made short video stories based on their folktales, family stories, and traditions. Some were unedited, where the camera would start and stop after five minutes of story where the story kind of acted out, non-verbally, with one long still shot. And then we did highly-edited versions of that same story using close-ups, medium shots, long shots, to structure the narrative using conventional film structure.

We were absolutely convinced that the Pokot people would not be able to understand the edited version because it was so highly fragmented. Think about it: if you've never seen film or television, you live in a seamless world. Reality is not edited. How strange it must seem to have all those juxtapositions of time and space. But in fact, to our surprise, the Pokot were perfectly able to comprehend those highly-edited stories. In fact, they comprehended the edited version of the story just as well as the unedited version. The next year we went back and we tested other kinds of editing techniques like flashback, where the events are presented out of time sequence and parallel montage, where two events are portrayed as happening at the same time by cutting back and forth between two locations. They could understand non-verbal narratives told using these visual conventions perfectly well. So this research actually got me my first award recognition and publication in the top-ranked *Journal of Communication*. When I got tenure, then I realized that I could go back to media literacy.

One of my professors at Harvard asked me to do some adjunct teaching at that time, so I got to teach at Harvard for about two years, one or two courses, one course a semester. That was great because I met all kinds of smart young women and men who were going to go off and have amazing careers. Like Dorothea Gillim, the founder/creator of *Word Girl*, the PBS show, she was one of my students. At Harvard, I got the idea to do a summer institute on media education in 1992 and 1993. The people at Harvard sat me down and showed me how to write a budget, and showed me how, if I wanted 100 people to show up, it would cost thousands and thousands of dollars. I wanted Neil Postman to come and give a lecture. I wanted Barry Duncan, Kathleen Tyner, David Considine, Bob Kubey and John Pungente to be there. These were the A-listers in media literacy that I had met in late '80s and early '90s. I reached out to Bobbi Kamil, the brand new executive director of Cable in the Classroom, which was the new nonprofit organization founded by the cable industry. At that time, they were making available hundreds of hours of educational TV shows available without commercials for educational use by teachers and students. So I knocked on her door and said, "I need money because I want to make a film about the Harvard Institute on Media Education because it's the first-ever national-level teacher education program for media literacy. I want to document it and I need $70,000." And she said, "Well, it really doesn't work that way but I can help you with distribution." She taught me how to approach the cable industry. She connected me to Amos Hostetter at Continental Cablevision, now one of the richest people in the world. His community affairs person said yes right away. They gave me $70,000, Bobbi Kamil said we'll distribute 10,000 VHS tapes of your documentary and basically I was off. It was my first experience with teacher education--- and my first experience as an executive producer of a documentary, *Tuning in to Media*. And it was all happening at the same time! Wow!

The first year of the Institute (1993) was truly magical. There were about 100 people in a sort of

horseshoe shaped classroom – very state of the art for that time period – and we had a whole glorious week together with all those luminaries that I just described, including Pat Aufderheide who was also there. I remember coming to the podium and saying, "I've been thinking about you and waiting for you and planning for this and planning to meet you for the last year and I'm so glad you're finally here!" Someone called out from the back of the room, "We've been waiting for you for *ten years*!" These were K-12 folks, but also people in public broadcasting, library media specialists, college faculty, media artists and independent producers who had caught the media literacy bug, caught it hard, and who basically wanted to find a community, continue educating themselves, and come together to have meaningful dialogue. It was easy to find that first 100 people and the second year, it was easy to find the second 100 people. Now that was awesome! Both years were amazing and I really begun to realize that there was a community of people who shared my passion.

In between my first Harvard Institute, and my second Harvard Institute was the Aspen Institute where I really first got to know Liz Thoman. I had met Liz briefly some years before, but I really got to know her really well at the Wye Conference Center event hosted by the Aspen Institute. I watched how Liz cultivated and nurtured a community of media literacy stakeholders through her editorial work with *Media & Values*, a publication I greatly admired.

During that time period around 1993, I started working in Billerica, a small working-class community near Boston, which was really great learning experience. Billerica High School was one of the first seven Channel One schools, where students watched 10 minutes of news and 2 minutes of advertising and schools got a closed-circuit TV system for every classroom in the building. And Dr. John Katsoulis, an assistant superintendent of Billerica schools, came to me and said, "We're really enthusiastic about this news service. We're committed to helping our students understand news, but we can't really bring it in our schools without helping our teachers figure out how to use it well. We think that this media literacy might be what we need." This seemed important work. I was quite leery, as we all were at the time, about the kind of business model that Channel One was offering to schools. How could I help the faculty and students in these schools?

And so I was asked to do a big staff development program for all 400 members of the faculty in the district and it was actually kind of scary because we're in a big auditorium, a big assembly program. I basically did a Media Literacy 101 course on what teachers and students need to know about Channel One, how they sell audiences to advertisers, how they decide what's news, how they adapt news to be kid friendly, how to critically analyze the commercials, how to critically analyze the news programs. After an hour and half teachers left and there in the back of the room there was this guy, in a three-piece suit, not looking like a teacher. He came up to me and introduced himself and his name was Jim Ritts, who later became CEO of Primedia. At that time, he was the vice president of something or other at Channel One. And I was like "Wow." He was in the back of the room the whole time. He said, "Let me take you for a cup of coffee." So we had a cup of coffee and I said, "Well first of all, did I accurately describe your company's goals and your business model and the economics behind it?" He said, "Absolutely, you got it right." And then he knocked my socks off. He said, "I really wish that you would go do this critical analysis and deconstruction of Channel One to every school district in America." He explained that he had been all over the country, trying to get Channel One in schools, and people in leadership positions -- heads of school boards and superintendents -- do not understand how the broadcasting business works, and what it takes to get programs on air. They want this, that and the other thing, but the thing is that they don't understand is how it gets paid for." He said, "I think you are doing an incredible service to the whole country and everybody in America needs understand more about the media and how to be a critical viewer." And he basically said this will help our business because if the audience knows these things, they will actually going to be more active viewers, they're

going to learn more. This is really what we need." And that really freaked me out. Until then, I was comfortable seeing big media executives as the enemy and this was the first time I could see their work as an authentic attempt to use capitalism to support innovation in education.

So, needless to say, he introduced me to Paul Folkemer, the principal at the Benjamin Franklin Middle School in Ridgewood, New Jersey. Thanks to Channel One's support, he brought all of his faculty, a team of ten teachers, to the Harvard Institute on Media Education in the second year. All ten teachers were trying to integrate media literacy in the middle school. So we started having big debates about Channel One as early as 1994. And then Billerica's superintendent came up to me and said, "I like this assembly program but we really need to build a cadre of leaders. A one-shot program for 400 teachers really doesn't do it. We need a bunch of teachers who make a commitment to teaching media literacy." Basically John Katsoulis showed me how to do create a Masters program in media literacy; I didn't really know how to do it at that time. We invented names and descriptions for ten courses. And voila we got 30 teachers to sign up and we did it. In three years, we cycled 30 teachers through a master's program.

For me, this was great: again *the participating teachers taught me how they learn best.* My thinking about the practices of staff development changed dramatically during those three years because I had to really step away from the idea of promoting my own expertise. I had to completely change the way I taught—this is where I became all about activities and questions and open discussion of you-name-it-everything. This class became a very tight warm and wonderful group. Bill Walsh was the writer of our group; he would post a weekly editorial in the local newspaper, synthesizing what he was getting out of the courses in these weekly editorials that went into the town newspaper. And it was a magical time.

TJ: Can you tell me about what shaped your practice?

RH: For me, what was important about this program was that there were 30 teachers and they were equally divided among elementary, middle and high school teachers. I could see that each group of teachers had specific needs and I could see each group of teachers were thinking about the certain group of children that they taught, they were teaching in all the subject areas from English to Social Studies to Health to Physical Education. We had the whole gamut of folks in the room. And what we all came to understand was that the essence of the work was about connecting the classroom to the culture. In fact, it was Damian Curtiss, the head of the language arts department, who first helped me deeply understand that media literacy was an expanded form of literacy. When teachers can take advantage of the connection between what kids do when they're out of school, and when they're in school, learning is robust. And the teachers had their own fantastic ride in the program, learning to analyze messages and make media as well. I remember there was one moment where I had to be absent. I came back the following week, and they had decided to meet in my absence and use that time to make a video. They basically taught each other. When I came back, they popped in the video and then we had this AMAZING conversation about what you learn when you make things. They initiated that project; they did it independently because they knew it needed to be done. So I recognized that the best thing about teaching was the opportunity to really and truly learn from my students. That was a huge "aha!" for me.

TJ: What were some other milestones for the field?

RH: Yikes! I haven't even told you the Discovery part of the story, yet. Let's talk about my earliest work with the Discovery Channel in 1994. Linda Brown contacted me totally out of the blue and said

that the Discovery Channel was launching a new network called The Learning Channel and they wanted to do some kind of teacher education event and the read about the Harvard Institute. "Won't you help us try to figure out how to help us with media literacy for teachers for the Learning Channel?" I said, "Sure." By then, I had made a decision, walking one summer on the beach on Cape Cod, to invest substantial energy in the advocacy role. For me, advocacy was like being out on the water, with the boat and the waves rocking and all the wind, versus the comfort and safety and distance of being solely a researcher and scholar, gazing out at the water but not really in the game. Linda Brown and I came on to the idea of teaching teachers how to critically analyze the documentary genre, long a special interest of mine. So we settled on that.

I got to create this wonderful workshop and curriculum called *Know TV* which in 1994, won the Golden Cable Ace Award. That consisted of a curriculum book with VHS tape of clips that went next to it,that I got to produce with the guy who made my first documentary with me, a terrific media professional named Rob Stegman from Blue Star Media. He really got media literacy and we had many years of remarkable collaboration. And after *KnowTV,* I got to go all over the country doing these workshops; I remember doing them in Charlotte, North Carolina; in Atlanta, Georgia; in Orlando, where I met Frank Baker – where he was a superb and imaginative media specialist in the Orlando public schools. So that's where I really got the feeling that the cable industry could be useful in supporting the media literacy movement. I had a series of successes, Bobbi Kamil had supported my documentary and now Discovery was supporting the development in implementation of teacher workshops for this. So I was feeling really warm and fuzzy about the cable industry's potential. I had stars in my eyes about what they were trying to do and I was a big champion. I told my colleagues, "Let's work with these people because we can harness their money and their reach to our goals." A lot of people thought I was crazy, naïve, and I don't know, maybe I was. But it's sort of the same ambivalent way I feel today about the role of Dell, Microsoft and Apple in the technology education business. They do have corporate agendas that shape every decision and they ARE key stakeholders in people getting smarter, more engaged and more thoughtful about media and technology.

Of course, I didn't realize at that time that those were the years leading up to the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act. What I didn't understand, and now looking back at history where hindsight shows everything right, during that period 1993, '94, '95 and '96 the cable industry was really trying to tell their story of their public spiritedness so that Congress could grant them this incredible windfall of a gift, the 1996 Telecom Act. This law essentially deregulated the cable industry and enabled them to compete with the phone companies. The law reaffirmed that the cable industry didn't have to be regulated the same way broadcasters were, that is, that they didn't have any public service obligation. So I now, looking back, realize that I was enmeshed in a tiny part of that sort in terms of the industry's public policy strategy to support that legislation.

Even at the time, I was aware of that legislation moving through Congress, it wasn't like I was unaware, but I was in Washington, learning in the field about how the business gets done. I knew that members of Congress were targeted because I got to meet all kinds of Congressmen as a part of this initiative and so I definitely knew there was a political agenda regarding the regulation of the media industry. I got to meet lobbyists, PR people and Congressional staffers all thinking really strategically about policy change. (So it was déjà vu all over again with the BTOP funding from the Commerce Department and the FCC report and the Knight Commission initiative in 2011).

As the media literacy community became a little club, we had lots of fights. Some it was the typical holier-than-thou liberal posturing and political correctness among scholars and advocacy people – stuff that I generally see as mostly worthless self-indulgent dreck. I remember the fights. Indeed, I was the

subject of some of these fights since my approach to seek external funding for media literacy by working with media companies as partners was considered particularly controversial at the time. How strange it was to be targeted by people who overtly rejected my ideas – and wrote about it. As someone who loves to be loved, this was a difficult period for me professionally and personally. But it was part of learning to be courageous and taking on the reins of leadership, too.

By then, the media literacy community began meeting at various conferences every year after that and in 1997, we formed the Partnership for Media Education (PME). I remember the phone call that started it all as vividly as if it were yesterday. I was standing in my kitchen, doing the dishes and on the phone with Liz Thoman, Lisa Reisberg from the American Academy of Pediatrics and Nancy Chase Garcia, from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. Lisa and Nancy pushed us in new ways to think big and so by the end of the call, we decided to plan a national conference in Colorado Springs, connecting media literacy to public health. We raised money. We planned. We promoted. We were a very good team. In the end, over 450 people attended! By 2001, thanks to leadership from Faith Rogow and others, we decided to transform from a "gang of four" to become a national membership association.

When students were murdered at Columbine High School in 1999, yet another door opened unexpectedly. When Columbine happened, of course, many Americans were freaked out. People were watching the TV during the whole standoff, with wounded children scrambling out of the windows. It was a pretty traumatic experience and there was a whole lot of craziness. It generated a powerful kind of public reflection on the scope of the desensitized world we were becoming and loss of humanity in evidence at the circumstances that led to this tragedy.

During the months after Columbine, a lot of teachers everywhere were feeling unsafe. I remember doing a teacher workshop at about this time; we were talking about how to talk to our kids about this event. What should we do? We knew we needed to talk about it with our students, but it was really hard for the teachers. I remember a teacher saying to me, "I know what I'm supposed to say to my students, 'This is a very unusual event, and this isn't very common and this hardly ever happens, you're safe in this school.'" I nodded my agreement. And then she said, "I know that's what I'm supposed to say, but I don't feel that way, I don't feel safe in this school; I can't tell the kids something that I don't feel is true."

I looked around. I'd never been in a room where so many teachers were wounded; we were all feeling very, very vulnerable. Out of that tragedy came an initiative from Judith McHale, the president of Discovery Channel who herself had children in the Maryland public schools and was seated on the Maryland State Board of Education. She made a decision, and in the public meeting with the board members of the Maryland State Board of Education, she said, "We will do a media literacy initiative for the children of Maryland." Boom! It was decided. And then I got the call. And so that project became *Assignment: Media Literacy.* With the help Discovery Channel executives, Carrie Passmore and Linda Brown and Nancy Brian, it was a major multimedia production that tested all of my skills in project management. It was a year of curriculum writing and pilot-testing, 30 Maryland teachers being our advisory group; a very elaborate production and research process of getting these curriculum books and tapes and packages made and then another two years of outreach in 23 counties across the state. I was so proud to be associated with the Discovery Channel.

We did dozens and dozens of these sessions, and each one had 150 or 200 people in the room, so it was great for my ego and my Rolodex. I met a lot of Maryland teachers. Many of those folks who were there were already on their own journey with media literacy, they had already gotten on the bandwagon and this was just a small gift: a pretty box with easy-to-use lesson plans and video clips. They were

ready to run with it. We got really great feedback from librarians and tech specialists and English teachers and I remember getting amazing descriptive emails for a bunch of years during that time period from teachers in rural schools of Maryland, in city schools of Maryland, in Baltimore City. Teachers were saying these lessons are easy for me to use and they work. And then Bob Kubey wrote the evaluation for that project, and it was over, so we closed the project's doors by 2001. I had a chance to go do a version of the *Assignment: Media Literacy* curriculum in Texas. We sat with Texas educators and cable TV executives in about 2002; we revised the curriculum for the state of Texas. But by that time, the funding was cut and the program never really had a roll out…the material got revised for Texas but never really implemented, which is a bit of a shame.

TJ: I think what's so significant about the Discovery project in Maryland, was that it is one of the only examples of a really systematic effort. You were going for the whole state, it was being supported systematically, and you had access to this system.

RH: Again this shows the complicated multi-stakeholder process of making change from the top-down and the bottom-up. In Maryland, we had good support from the state superintendent of schools Nancy Grasmick, and we had great support from the corporation. So we had the money and the state's support but what really made the difference was at the community level. Some communities were really able to run with it like Silver Springs, Cecil County, and other places. And in other communities where the concept of media literacy was new and unfamiliar, there was less initiative. Leadership at the local level is key. In a decentralized education system, building-level leadership makes a huge difference in whether or not innovation is going to happen. I learned to appreciate the role of principals and superintendents in the change process. We made a lot of progress in Maryland with this initiative, but not every student in Maryland got to benefit from this work. It's a big state. We could've done a better job at reaching out to the principals and nurturing building-level leadership.

TJ: So the administrative level is a whole other level…

RH: And the problem was that we were juggling a lot of stakeholders while at the same time the principals were juggling so many other priorities. It wasn't like they were hostile; they just had lots of balls in the air, including special education, facilities issues, and curriculum issues. So, I can't blame administrators, but I don't know that we thought about them and their unique needs as deeply as we might have. When I look back at the project, that's the part of it I didn't design carefully enough.

TJ: That was a significant milestone … so let's see, we've gotten to late '90s early 2000s…

RH: The story that I just told you happened basically with me in the role of a consultant. So, in addition to teaching my six courses, this was my other job. I guess I've been doing two or more jobs for most of my professional life. Why? This was the place of passion. For some period of time, it was really pretty separate from my day job as a professor of mass communication in a business school. The shift in my own career came in 2003 when I was able to come to Temple University and better integrate my passion for media literacy and my actual job, because I now teach doctoral students and masters students and undergraduates, and I actually get to teach and do research on media literacy. And I have a whole new crew of young scholars and teachers who are great thinkers and doers and collaborators. So for me, its' been a huge and wonderful shift because now there finally is a literature on media literacy. There are lots of teachers all over the country doing innovative and creative work. Unlike my

experience in 1985, students now can write a doctoral dissertation about media literacy—and more than 50 people have in the last five years.

Now there's a new challenge that I'm still trying to figure out – and I wouldn't say I have much in the way of accomplishment after seven years at Temple -- is how to make universities be more effective players in the media literacy movement. When I came to Temple, I developed the idea of the Media Education Lab so that the primary resources of the university (our students and our faculty) can help advance media literacy education through scholarship and community service. The community service part is easy: there's a boatload of needs in our local communities, and our talented graduate students and undergrads can get placed in schools and work with educators -- and media literacy happens. Everybody wins. That part is easy.

The advancing scholarship part is hard because the field is still a bit compromised by its multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary nature. A young scholar who is really interested in media literacy -- the big question for them is, what discipline do they enter in, communication, education, public health, sociology. What field do they enter? We don't have an answer for that, because none of those shoes exactly fit. Some part of all those shoes fit. I hope to solve that problem in my lifetime. I would really love to have an opportunity to create an interdisciplinary program where those silos don't have to interfere with the quality of scholarship for media literacy. I've been giving speeches about that based on my Knight Foundation paper, basically called "Down with the Silos." Until we can have truly interdisciplinary programs that connect English education to education to literary studies to sociology to media and communication, until you can actually study that all of a piece, then the scholarship of media literacy is going to continue to be at the margin…where it is right now, still at the margin in terms of public education. I hope I can get to develop this new kind of program someday…

TJ: What were the surprises for you along the way?

RH: Back in Aspen with a roomful of smart and passionate people who were deeply invested in media literacy, the first time, we discussed: Is this a field or a movement? And that was the big challenge. I remember at some point feeling really conflicted. I think I wanted it to be a field. I was kind of the anti-movement girl in the room: "It's a field of inquiry; it's a place of research and discovery," I insisted. I was the proponent of the "big tent" idea: people from all across the ideological spectrum can engage with the power of media literacy. And other people were saying, "No, no, it's a social movement" and it's inevitably tied to core ideas of liberalism. I now think it is a movement, even though I continue to hope it can appeal to Democrats, Republicans, and everyone else. In the Knight white paper I just published, I am calling digital and media literacy a *community education movement*.

I continue to be pleasantly surprised at the diversity of stakeholder involvement. It's amazing. People are coming to this movement with different kinds of expertise, just the kind of expertise we actually need for a broad-based social movement. There are parents, business leaders, museum educators, computer programmers and civil rights activists and anti-poverty advocates and art teachers and school counselors. To me the idea that people are coming with this wide range of different kinds of expertise into this field is a sign that it's a full-on community education movement; plus the fact that it's happening in different settings including K-12, college, the workplace, and other settings beyond school.

Most importantly, media literacy is now a finally a part of our public discourse, and we see that so clearly now in TV shows like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*. Thank you, Jon and Steven!

Many of the important questions about how best to teach media literacy (to students and to teachers) are still unresolved. So another surprise for me is in the way the great debates I identified in 1998 are still robust and vital, even as the field is migrating toward a different theoretical formulation because of the rise of celebrity culture, popular culture, and digital literacy. I would anticipate that as more stakeholders and more folks from different points of view continue to enter the field, we are going to have to examine those key concepts and critical concepts again; I think we are going to have to have another Aspen Institute. I think the effort we've made over the past 25 years brings together people around a shared conversation despite our differences and because of our differences; therefore we need a set of strong theoretical and conceptual strands that unite us, lest we risk becoming incoherent. Indeed, all this collaborative effort has been very good for us; and I think the field has benefited tremendously from all of those efforts... the Five Key Questions, the CML Medialit Kit, all those things that try to connect or to identify common themes, issues and values. We can't stop doing that. We have to keep discovering how best to bring new people and new ideas into the community so that children, young people and all people will benefit.