I am so grateful that this year's National Association for Media Literacy Education conference was virtual (enabling me to attend for the first time!) for a number of reasons:

- **COVID safety**: the pandemic is still raging but nobody is taking precautions anymore so virtual attendance is the best way to avoid infection with this novel, vascular, neurotropic disease that is silently disabling a large portion of the population (and remains the #3 cause of death in Canada). What you don't see behind all those social media photos of unmasked smiling faces at conferences in venues with unknown indoor air quality is the number of my colleagues who later quietly disclose that they brought COVID home with them.
- **Affordability**: conference fees are often expensive enough -- who can afford flights and lodging and meals on top of that every time they want to share/learn/network at a conference?
- **Reduced carbon footprint**: flying everywhere for conferences unnecessarily increases our carbon footprint and, given that we figured out how to make conferences work online during COVID lockdowns, and that the evidence of impending catastrophic climate change is everywhere, I don't think we can justify that anymore.
- **Attending ALLTHESESSIONS**: all sessions are recorded and available for asynchronous attendance until October 1st. Though I still had to decide which sessions to participate in synchronously when there were several competing for my attention in the same time slot, I was able to circle back and attend the other sessions competing for my attention asynchronously.
- **Gapless notes:** my not-very-skilled-at-auditory-learning brain really benefited from live closed captioning during presentations and transcripts to be able to refer back to afterwards. We all talk about that saturation point in a conference day where our brains do not seem to be braining anymore (as my students would say) and sometimes sessions are so jam packed or go so fast that we can't catch all the details we want in our notes -- I was able to fill in those gaps with the transcripts.

After the compounded existential crises of the past 5 years, I simply cannot take a presenter/organization's claimed commitment to equity seriously if they are not leading by example by at least providing a hybrid option. And contrary to the myth that in-person attendance at conferences is essential for networking, I met a tonne of smart people doing fascinating and important work. Everyone I reached out to by chat or email generously offered to share resources, ideas and bounce ideas around and my newly expanded digital Professional Learning Network is much enriched. And I still won some really cool swag by participating in the trivia challenges!

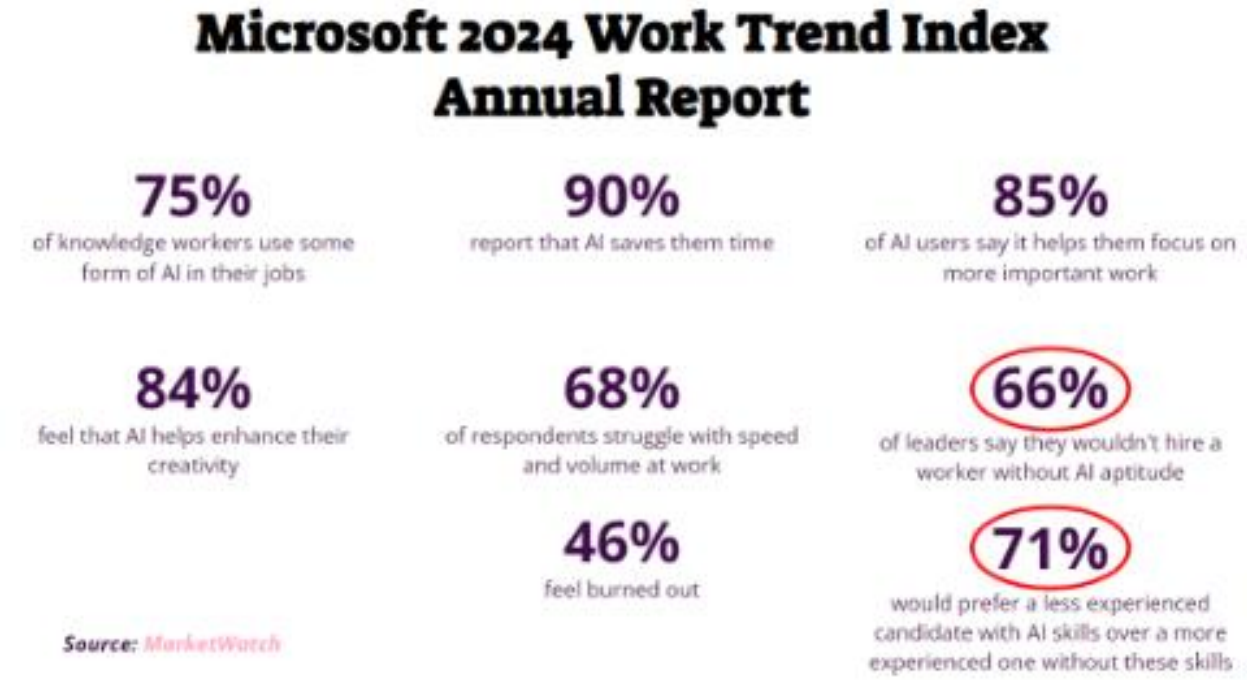
I'm the proud new owner of a Media Literacy De-Fined tote bag!
Because this format allowed me to attend every session I wanted to (so I attended some asynchronously), I'm going to group my reflections by theme rather than schedule.

Generative Artificial Intelligence
Sessions (copied from conference programme)
"Media Literacy in the Face of AI: Multimodality Learning" by Natalie Leake, ELA/Media Literacy Educator & EdTech/AI Leader
"AI tools, platforms, and policies that augment the integration of media literacy principles, teaching students to be active & critical consumers and productors of information will be explored. Receive an AI Resource Board: content-area platforms, proactive strategies for plagiarism, productivity in the classroom, HOT new tools, differentiation & policies. A media-literacy English course will be shared as a model to shift learning to increase active inquiry, reflection, and critical thinking."
"Algorithmic Awareness: A Key Component of Modern Media Literacy" by Dr. Scott Moss, Program Director, EdTech National University

"This session describes the synthesis of computer science and critical media literacy to empower students to evaluate, challenge, and reconstruct algorithmically-driven media, including generative AI. The critical examination of and interactions with these algorithmic effects help students question algorithmic authority."

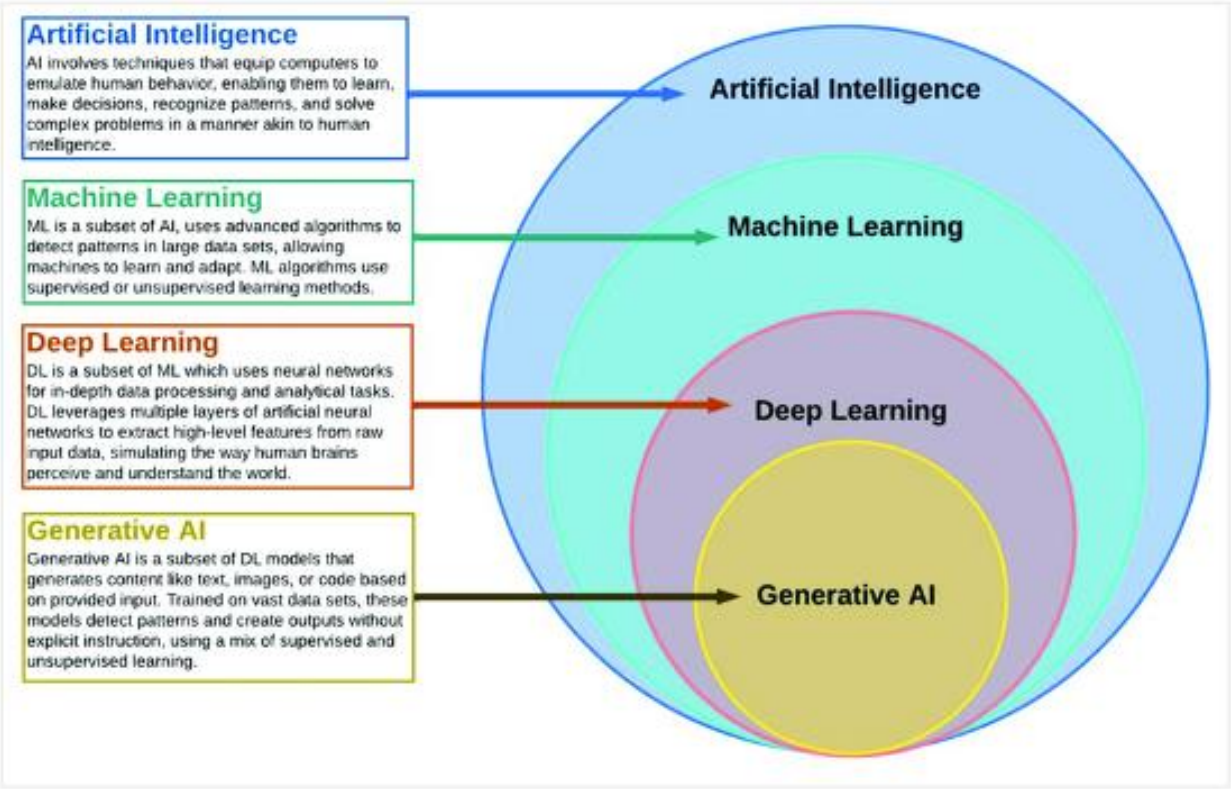
Key Takeaways:

- Pandora's Box has already been opened and there is no closing it now. Society is already saturated with AI. Every technology brings both benefits and hazards and GenAI is no exception. Unfortunately, the response from educators thus far has been too focussed on the "fear/flight" response which urgently needs to be balanced with the "enthusiastic/embrace" response. To support this position, Natalie Leake pointed us toward Microsoft's 2024 Work Trend Index Annual Report findings that 75% of knowledge workers use some form of AI at their jobs, 90% of these say it saves them time (68% say they struggle with speed and volume at work, and 46% say they feel burned out), 85% say it helps them focus on their more important work and 84% say it helps them be more creative. Further, 66% of leaders say they wouldn't hire a worker without some kind of AI aptitude, and 71% say they would prefer to hire a less experienced candidate with AI skills than a more experienced one without AI skills. Media Literacy is essential to give our students foundational GenAI skills, to help them think critically about this technology and to use it mindfully and ethically.



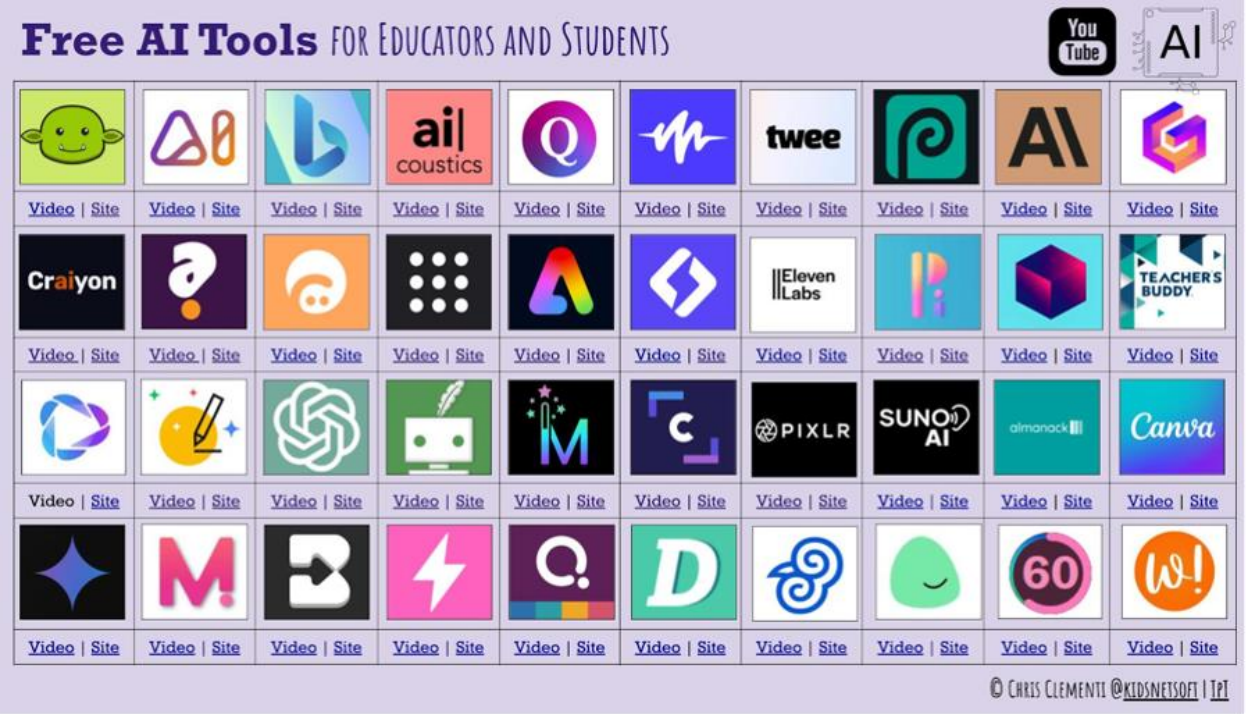
- SciFi dystopia is not here just yet -- the robots are not taking over. Take a deep breath and learn the vocabulary and what this technology actually is. What most of us are actually talking about when we toss the word AI around is a subset of a subset -- Generative AI. It is important that educators and students know the difference.

Mashable has created "the ultimate AI glossary" to help us keep the terminology straight.



A comparative view of AI, machine learning, deep learning, & generative AI (Zhuhadar & Lytras, 2023)

- While ChatGPT is the name on most educators' tongues, "ChatGPT is the McDonalds of the Generative AI world — it ain't the only burger in town." Leake introduced us to a TONNE of applications to experiment with in order to decide which and how we might use to increase our own productivity and enhance teaching & learning (e.g. Free AI Tools for Educators and Students, Generative A.I. Tools for Educators). I also appreciated her empowering message that in this moment when "most mainstream EDtech platforms are looking for their AI edge," educators have the power to frame development and usage. She reminded us that while "marketers got the ball rolling" and "we can't stop it, we can be the bumpers to direct the best possible outcome of AI's impact on education & society at large."



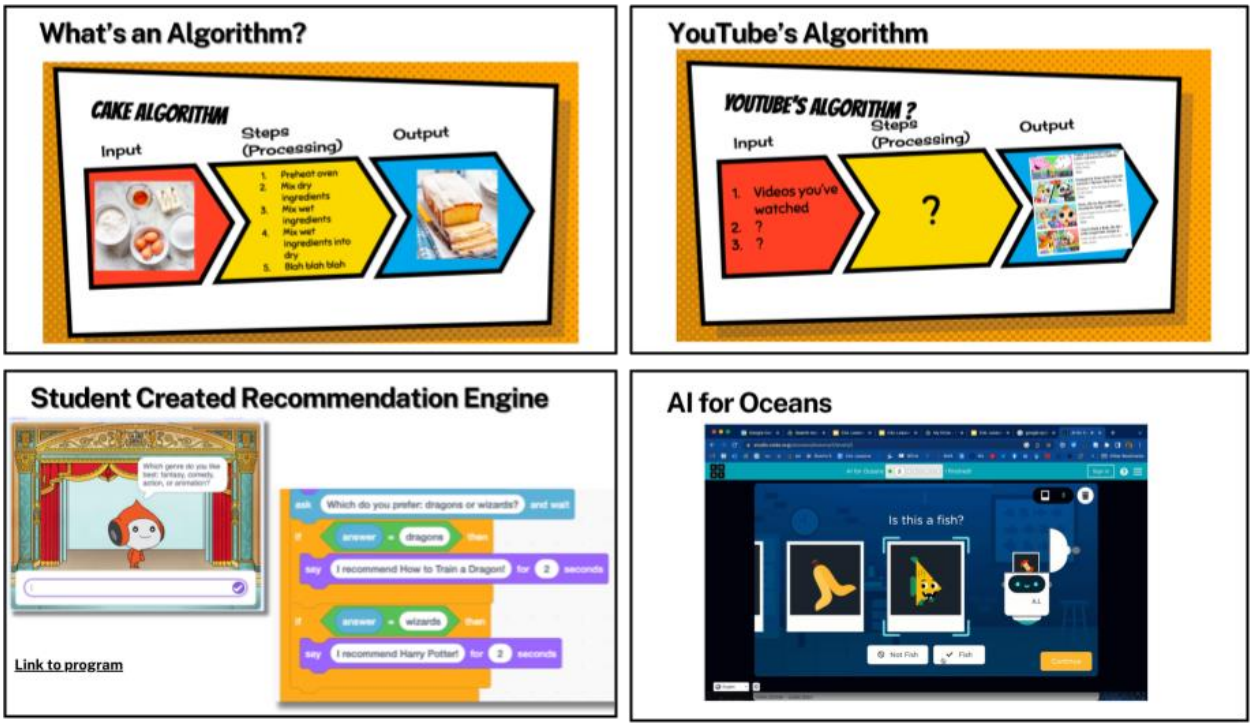
Free AI Tools for Educators and Students (Clementi, 2023)

- Banning AI from our classrooms does our students a disservice and AI detectors do not work. At all. Worse, they disproportionately generate false-positives for ELL students' writing. Educators urgently need to rethink the writing process & our assessments. In terms of busting cheating after the fact, some analogue English teacher tricks against plagiarism are still effective (e.g. knowing your students' writing style, triangulating products with conversations and observations, focus on writing process), but we need to be more proactive than that. Leake is experimenting with making it classroom policy to have students work in a document that tracks their writing process (Chrome extensions like Revision History, Copyleaks, Brisk Teaching, and Draftback enhance Google's "version history" feature) and making process and product equally 50% of the assignment mark. But we also need to rethink "essayism" (Leake didn't use this word but this is where my anti-colonial brain immediately went). Leon Furze created the AI Assessment Scale in May and it has already taken on a life of its own with educators from K-12 to post-secondary creating their own adaptations making explicit what is and is not acceptable AI use on any particular assignment. And Dr. Henry Chan has created the 3R Framework for Generative AI-related Assessment to think aloud about how we might change our grading practices for AI-assisted assignments.

1	**NO AI**	The assessment is completed entirely without AI assistance. This level ensures that students rely solely on their knowledge, understanding, and skills. **AI must not be used at any point during the assessment.**
2	**AI-ASSISTED IDEA GENERATION AND STRUCTURING**	AI can be used in the assessment for brainstorming, creating structures, and generating ideas for improving work. **No AI content is allowed in the final submission.**
3	**AI-ASSISTED EDITING**	AI can be used to make improvements to the clarity or quality of student created work to improve the final output, but no new content can be created using AI. **AI can be used, but your original work with no AI content must be provided in an appendix.**
4	**AI TASK COMPLETION, HUMAN EVALUATION**	AI is used to complete certain elements of the task, with students providing discussion or commentary on the AI-generated content. This level requires critical engagement with AI generated content and evaluating its output. **You will use AI to complete specified tasks in your assessment. Any AI created content must be cited.**
5	**FULL AI**	AI should be used as a 'co-pilot' in order to meet the requirements of the assessment, allowing for a collaborative approach with AI and enhancing creativity. **You may use AI throughout your assessment to support your own work and do not have to specify which content is AI generated.**

AI Assessment Scale (Furze, 2023)

- Dr. Scott Moss reminded us that "AI is a subset of Computer Science so we need to understand Computer Science if we want to understand AI," so (apologies in advance) but we need to add algorithmic literacy to our list of literacies. He gave us some simple ideas and activities to help break down how algorithms work for even our youngest learners: a baking metaphor to understand the Input-Processing-Output (IPO) Model, simple Scratch activities (e.g. a student created recommendation engine that helps students understand that choice is highly structured by platforms and recommendations might not make sense) and Code.org activities (e.g. students practise training AI in the AI for Oceans activity and see how things get accepted or rejected based on training data and clearly see that GenAI is only as good as the training we give it.



I-P-O model, Student Created Recommendation Engine & AI for Oceans (Moss, 2024)

- The elephant in the digital rooms was ethics. Some media literacy staples like bias and disinformation got an AI update (see below), but with the exception of Dr. Mattison's presentation (which was disappointingly theoretical so I have not otherwise reflected on it here), more macro-level concerns like carbon footprint and exploitative labour practices and intellectual/creative theft were never the focus of the conversation in the sessions I attended. There was some talk about this around the edges of presentations and in chats between participants but nothing to help me understand why some are questioning whether we should even be using GenAI in education at all given potentially devastating impacts.

Imperfectly-Perchance.org-generated elephant in the room (Alvermann & Heiss, 2024)

So What? Now What?

- I am resolved in my conviction that educators need to adapt to the biggest revolution in communications technology since the Internet ASAP. I need to double-down on my efforts to get my own school and departments to consider the important questions together during our once/month Professional Learning Community (PLC) time. So far I have only a few "enthusiastic/embrace" colleagues while most are stuck in "fear/flight" mode. Thankfully 2 of my GenAI curious colleagues are department heads whose opinions have a louder voice at the table so if we add a bit more organization to our curiosity we might be able to make this happen next year.
- So far I've only experimented beyond ChatGPT with EdPuzzle and Copilot, which was the game-changer that allowed me to see more educational use-cases because it provides references for fact checking. But so far I have only really used these successfully to assist in multiple choice question, rubric and lesson slide deck creation. I'd previously explored some of the EduAI apps for these purposes,

but was not impressed with their outputs and went back to CoPilot. I'm still skeptical of these platforms (what do they have to offer that the AI they run off of doesn't do better?) but maybe it's time to give these another chance? This time, I'm more interested in seeing what they might be able to do for my students. I'm most interested in tutoring bots (Khanmigo seems to be the leader in this area but requires a subscription and is still only available in the US. SchoolAI may be the next best and it's free.) and research support (would Perplexity work better for my students than CoPilot?); but there are some other promising tools I need to investigate -- Goblin Tools' Magic ToDo tool can help students backwards plan large assignments (something I've been trying to teach my "Learning Strategies" (Special Education) students for years with limited success), and Magic School for Students has some promising apps like book suggestions (despite my best efforts at staying current with YA and Graphic Novel publishing, AI should be able to provide more comprehensive recommendations for my reluctant readers), quiz me, and writing feedback tools. I particularly like that many of these tools allow the teacher to track and monitor student interactions on a self-contained, secure platform.

- Coding is a bandwagon I have never been able to get on mostly because I couldn't figure out how to make coding applicable to English classes. Enter "algorithmic literacy" — time for me to make time to play with Scratch again now that Dr. Moss has helped me see where coding fits in my subject area.
- I've spent the past year thinking about how I need to rethink the writing process and my assessment and evaluation practises but have only tinkered around the edges without much success. I've already told my students I must be able to see clear evidence of their writing process in their Google Docs, but still clicking through second by second in their version history when their work gets flagged as potentially AI-generated is a time consuming process that still relies on dubious software. I'm definitely going to experiment with some of the Chrome extensions Leake recommended to make this process more efficient. But this is still insufficient. The end of this past semester was a hellscape of last minute, unauthorized and unacknowledged GenAI submissions from students that actually prevented me from submitting my final grades on-time. Apologies in advance to my English department colleagues who had a strong negative reaction to my GenAI PLC proposal in June, but I am going to have to go all-in on a radical rethink for September. I think the policy change that will have the best impact on my own mental health and curbing student cheating with GenAI is to make process work a larger, more explicit, portion of the final assignment mark. Leake's 50-50 model alone would do it (because even if GenAI was able to score 100% on my rubrics [it can't -- it usually scores in the level 2 range], students who do not engage in the process work would only earn 50%. I'm going to have to figure out how to make this work with Ontario's A&E policies (e.g. on first glance KICA might only allow for a maximum of 30% for process under the Thinking/Inquiry portion of the Achievement Chart) but maybe incorporating something like the 3R rubric into my own rubrics would work?

Everything old is new again (digital updates to ML staples)
Sessions (copied from conference programme)
"Breaking Bias: Media Literacy in The Generative Age (AI)" by Marina Pisto - Lombardo, Elementary Educator, **&** Alana Winnick**,** Ed Tech Director, Pocantico Hills CSD

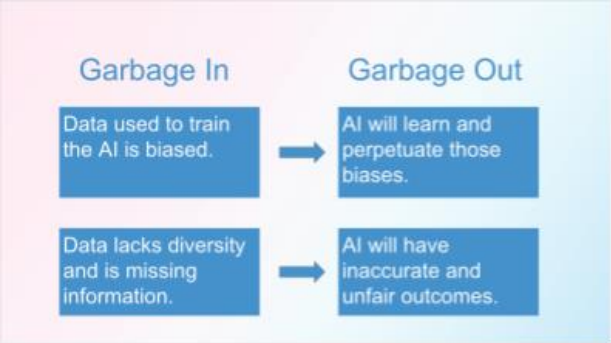
"Discover our district-wide initiative that empowers students to critically analyze AI-generated content, fostering comprehensive media literacy. We teach K-8 students strategies to uncover bias, misinformation, and deepfakes. Students use their own culture as an analysis lens through the experience. This initiative is the first step in preparing students for the AI-driven world, addressing potential issues, and unveiling limitless possibilities."
Using Critical Media Literacy to Spot Veiled Digital Advertising: Identifying Influencers, Paid Content, and Product Placements" by Gwynne Ellen Ash**, Ph.D.**, Texas State University
"Critical media literacy programs often include a critique of advertising and instruction in recognizing propaganda techniques. However, much of the advertising that tweens and teens are exposed to isn't as explicit as traditional advertising. Influencers, including other children, tweens, and teens monetized by their parents, promote a variety of products through their social media posts and videos, which seem to be entertainment, but instead are paid advertisements that fly under the radar. Using critical media literacy techniques, students will learn how to identify and critique advertising that is hiding in plain sight. This session will include strategies and activities appropriate for the classroom."
"Propaganda of Our Time: Talking to Your Students About Memes" by Arianna Grassia, Librarian, Hastings High School/Farragut Middle School, Hastings on Hudson
"The session will focus on the meme unit currently being taught as part of a larger Media Literacy course for 7th grade students at Farragut Middle School in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY. Background about memes influence in our culture and society will set the stage. I will share the lessons preceding the persuasive memes unit and then delve deeper into persuasive memes, sharing student work. Lessons can be easily adapted for upper elementary and high school courses."

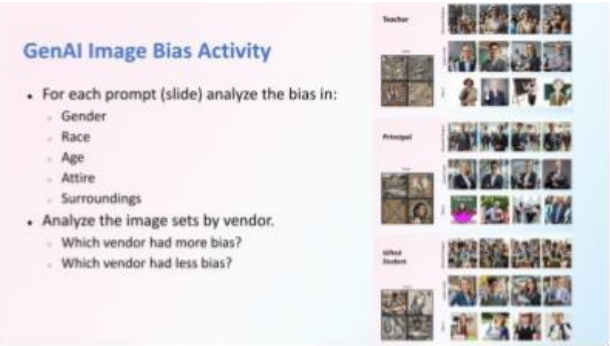
"Digital Storytelling Across Mediums: Lessons for Engagement" by Danielle Bainbridge**,** Assistant Professor of Theatre, Black Studies, and Performance Studies, Northwestern University
"What are the benefits of digital storytelling? And how can we teach students to tell complex and entertaining narratives online through teaching and learning? When Danielle proposed to teach the course "Digital Storytelling" for the first time in the Spring of 2021, a pandemic was the furthest thing from her mind. But when it became evident that classes would remain online during the COVID19 pandemic, she faced a novel challenge: teaching a course remotely while also engaging and activating her students' creativity. For this keynote, Danielle will analyze the lessons she learned from these narratives and stories that made her laugh, think, and empathize in new ways. She'll outline the pitfalls of the process, how she managed a complex learning environment, and what it made possible for her students and for her as an instructor. She will explore strategies and techniques for

teaching digital storytelling in the digital age and how instructors can guide their students to create compelling narratives that experiment with style and form."

Key Takeaways:

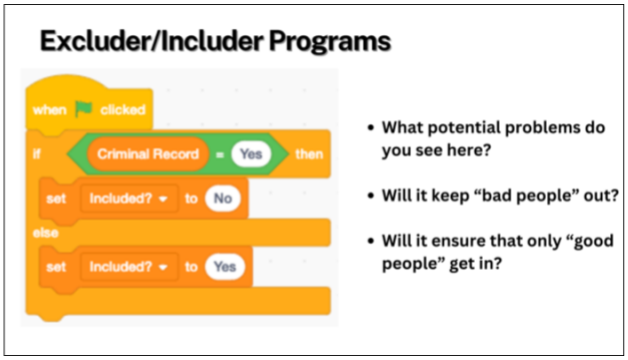
- GenAI is the shiny new kid on the block when it comes to a favourite critical media literacy lens: examining text bias. This is perhaps most explicitly explored in image output, as demonstrated by Lombardo & Winnick, but should also be explored in terms of text output and algorithmic literacy as well as exploring the potential to exacerbate social inequities when GenAI is used in policing, sentencing, hiring, university admissions, credit/housing approvals etc., as demonstrated by Dr. Moss.





GenAI Bias (Lombardo & Winnick, 2024)

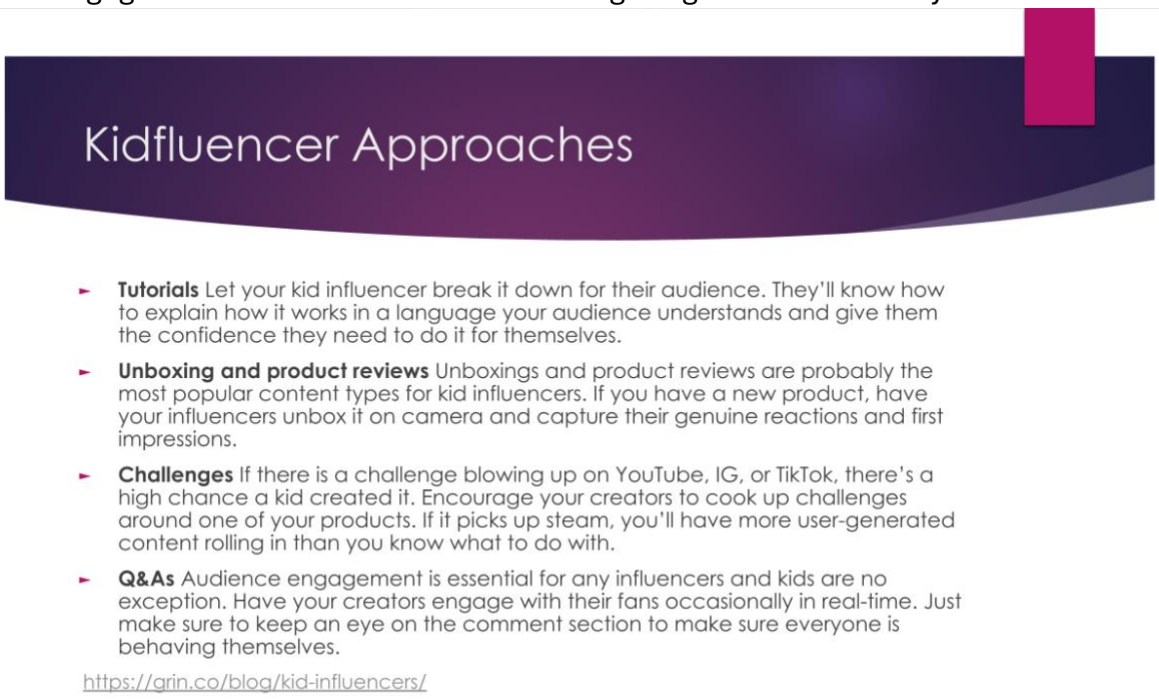
Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Medical Diagnosis	Privacy concerns
Weather Prediction	Biased policing and sentencing
Customized lessons for students	Environmental impact
Convenience of recommended media	Unfair employment of school admissions
Navigation	Biased credit and housing approvals
Workplace safety	Whom does this algorithm/AI advantage or disadvantage?



Positive & Negative Impacts of GenAI (Moss, 2024)

- For some reason I found myself surprised when Marina Pisto - Lombardo said her kids can't use Perplexity themselves and they must use it together as a class on the teacher's account due to privacy concerns. This shouldn't be a novel idea for me as I've just spent the past 3 years as a Digital Lead Learner being reminded and reminding others ad nauseam that all edtech we use in the classroom must be Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)-compliant for very good reasons. All the same rules apply with GenAI use in education: don't feed confidential student information into GenAI apps, the less data you give it the better, check out the EULA to ensure data won't be used in objectionable ways.
- Advertising is another ML staple that we may have abandoned for newer, shinier baubles. But critical understanding of propaganda techniques is more important than ever. While updating our advertising units to include digital product placement and paid content might seem like a no-brainer, I found Dr. Gwynne Ellen Ash's

exploration of the role of social media influencers in marketing thoroughly fascinating (take, for example, the recent phenomenon of tweens obsessed with skin care). Bringing influencer-culture into the classroom would mean instant engagement for students who have strong allegiances to a variety of influencers.



"The most effective content types for kid influencers" (Grin in Ash, 2024)

- Similarly, Arianna Grassia's decision to bring memes into the classroom was an instant hit that created a lot of buzz in her school's hallways. While meme-study is not a new idea for me, the idea of exploring memes as propaganda is. Grassia pointed out that through their replicating nature, memes have "massive power and influence" and "a much further reach than propaganda leaflets" ever did and given that some studies show memes have "a major influence on people's decision of who to vote for" or "whether to vote" and that some of these memes were made in overseas disinformation "troll farms" for the purpose of interfering in foreign elections, academia should give them more consideration for study.

Memes as propaganda (Facing History in Grassia, 2024)

- Dr. Danielle Bainbridge's keynote on Digital Storytelling walked us step by step through the storytelling process she teaches to her theatre majors for "telling a story for digital first audiences", sharing so many exercises and insights along the way that I couldn't keep up live and was grateful to be able to return to the transcript of the recording to complete my notes. I really appreciated her focus on student engagement and empowerment. When she first taught this course during emergency remote teaching, her students told her the course made them "feel more connected during a time of loneliness". Given that I and my students continue to teach and learn in an online environment and my students continue to share that this experience can sometimes feel isolating, this definitely caught my attention. I also appreciated the reminder of "why the digital sphere is still such a powerful tool for engaging audiences and interacting with the world around us…that you don't need thousands of dollars and advanced technical skills to create successful work when you're just starting out you can be armed with nothing more than a smartphone and a good idea."

Digital Storytelling definition (Bainbridge, 2024)

So What? Now What?

- I love the idea of visual literacy itself and have been doing "what's going on in this picture" with my grade 9s for several years, but I also really like Grassia's picture book and meme ideas. This is the second time the idea of studying memes in the classroom has come across my PD radar (the last time was Kulsoom Anwer's inspirational micro-session during my Board's annual English Symposium in February) — my colleagues have now gifted me enough ideas to start playing with this in my classroom as well.
- Exploring AI bias via visual output also seems straightforward enough for me to begin playing with this in my classroom and I love how the concrete nature of this activity will make this topic explicit for even my least-skilled learners.
- There are some other digital updates I want to consider that will require more investigation first because either I lack the information and personal experience in my own media habits (the role of influencers in current marketing techniques) or this plus they have not yet been presented to me in enough detail to give me a path to even begin exploration (how to spot deep fakes and AI generated disinfo).
- I have been thinking a lot about what decolonial approaches I might use for the "Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Voices" English course (NBE) I finally get to teach in September (I've been waiting 24 years for this opportunity!). I had already been thinking about centering the course around Indigenous concepts of storytelling in terms of receptive communication (the worst injustice I can think about our Board's move to substitute the NBE course for the regular English course would be allowing a bunch of English teachers to colonize it

with Western literary constructs through systemic inertia) but Bainbridge's keynote on digital storytelling filled in a missing piece in terms of my thinking about expressive communication in this course. I think that incorporating her ideas for student media productions into the course (more earnestly than I have been thus far) would help with the work of decolonizing by moving away from "essayism" as assessment products. This is reinforcement from a prior teaching from Dr. Todorova -- my Thesis Advisor and professor of the "Critical Media Literacy" course I took in my graduate studies at OISE 4 years ago. I may also check out KQED Teach's self-paced courses (introduced in the "Practical & Proven Approaches to Student Media Making from Three PBS Educators" session I also attended but have not otherwise reflected on here) on "implementing and Assessing Student [Audio, Video, and Graphics] Projects" to see what additional tips these might offer.

Ideas from other media literacy orgs
Sessions (copied from conference programme)

"Tips for a Terrific Media Literacy Week" by Pamela Morris, Associate Professor & **Kym Kramer**, LIS Lecturer / Director of Director of School Library Media Education, Indiana University
"Join members of Indiana University's Media Literacy Week team as they share recommendations for building an impactful Media Literacy Week. IU grew from four events on one regional campus community in 2017 to an interdisciplinary team spanning five campus communities with a dozen events in 2023. Whether you are new to organizing Media Literacy Week events or aiming to expand your programming, this team's tips will inspire your celebration of the 10th Annual Media Literacy. Themes include finding and enlisting collaborators, generating ideas, motivating attendance, and marketing your program. They will invite participants to share their own tips as well."
"Spotlighting NAMLE's Youth Council" by Pride David**, Pranav Karthikeyan,** Jenna Meleedy**,** Jillian Dosky**, Flora Uslaner, &** Lily Afify, NAMLE Youth Advisory Council Members
"This past year, NAMLE established the Youth Advisory Council with the mission to accelerate the adoption of media literacy as a highly valued and widely practiced skill. By creating a formal collaboration with youth leaders of media literacy and education, NAMLE and our community has the incredible opportunity to co-create with young people. Join this conversation with the first ever YAC cohort to learn more about their goals and the resources they are developing, in addition to the broader aspirations of the council."

Key Takeaways:

- Association for Media Literacy (AML) always marks Media Literacy Week, though on a smaller scale than some orgs like NAMLE. So I was eager to learn how Morris and Kramer grew Indiana University's ML week from 3 events in 2017 to a dozen last year. They gave us 7 tips for running our own "Terrific Media Literacy Week" based on their experience: 1) Identify your audience(s), 2) Seek collaborators, 3) Partner with the Education sector, 4) Vary modalities, 5) Market events, 6) Plan to plan, 7) Create

media messages. They also gave us a handy “Visioning & brainstorming” slide deck template to start our own collaboration.

- We had an opportunity to hear from some of the National Association for Media Literacy Education’s Youth Council members about their work. Pranav Karthikeyan introduced us to the goals of the council: to "make media literacy current and relevant” in order to “allow students to have a more positive and safe media experience,” promote ethical and responsible use, and generally support their peers to “thrive in the digital world." I am rather saddened that most of the youth council members’ ML journeys began with either a brush with misinformation, doom scrolling during pandemic school closures, or book banning. Only one student talked about creative uses as a student at a performing arts high school. None talked about joy or liberation. But hearing their stories, I understand why they seem to have taken an inoculation approach. As Jenna Meleedy so eloquently described, “media literacy for me is so enmeshed with civic engagement….at critical points of our development, we were faced with this fire hose of constant catastrophic news: school shootings, climate change, the pandemic, which political party is destroying the world. So my news fatigue and decision fatigue was through the roof so I turned to decisionless social media like Tiktok for stress relief, which was at just the perfect time for my brain to develop addictive technology habits that I feel trapped in….We're part of this guinea pig generation, the first not to know life before the Internet. And we have first hand experience of how unsupported technology use] has shaped our mental health, our social circles, our ability to understand the world. I have classmates who have joined extremist circles because they fell down the wrong Internet rabbit hole at a young age. And I know others who were groomed. And all this time the adults in our lives didn't have the media literacy skills to understand what we were doing online, let alone help us navigate it.” Ooooof! That is a huge indictment fellow adults! And a convincing call to action for make space for the inoculation approach to #MediaLiteracy.

Karthikeyan's media literacy journey started with a 5-headed snake (NAMLE Youth Council, 2024)

So What? Now What?

- I look forward to reading the product of the Youth Council's first initiative -- an "AI and education best practices" guide for educators -- and will be checking my inbox for the announcement of its imminent release.
- I'll be bringing these tips for expanding our Media Literacy Week programming and the idea of a youth council to AML's Think Tank in August for discussion with my colleagues.