Are you aware of how many times you post or share on social media each day? Do you feel secure sharing posts and photos within your friend group? How about outside your friend group? A recent study by MediaSmarts in Canada, found that young people shared personal posts with unintended recipients at an alarming rate. Posts were captured and shared without the consent or knowledge of the original sender. As the MediaSmarts report makes clear on several levels, media literacy education is needed! CML teaches students to use the Empowerment Spiral of Awareness, Analysis, Reflection and Action. The Empowerment Spiral* is an effective tool for exploring one’s relationship to media.

Take your students through the Empowerment Spiral using their own data.

AHA! I use social media more/less than I realized!

Grade: 9-12

Materials: Personal devices (phone, ipad, …), computer and projection screen, paper and colored pencils or infographics program (for example, canva.com or other free program), CML Empowerment Spiral.

Key Question #1: Who created this message? (consumer). What am I authoring? (producer).

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.
Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent? (consumer). Why am I sending this message? (producer).

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are sent to gain profit and/or power (power can mean influence, popularity, intimidation...).

Activity: Ask students How many tweets, posts, messages... do you send each day? Have students make a list of their favorite social media platforms and how often they post to each platform per day – include Shared posts. The idea is to have real data so they will need to count, no guessing. Have each student create a simple bar graph illustrating their findings (Awareness). Pair with another student to discuss the results. Is it more or less than they expected? Any surprises? (Analysis). Is the convenience of digital communication worth the vulnerability and privacy issues that come with social media? Do they ever share posts not meant for sharing? Why? (Reflection). What can they do differently? (Action).


*The Empowerment Spiral is based on the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.

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, © 2002-2018, Center for Media Literacy.