

PROJECT
NML

Project NML Sends a Shout-Out to Mixed Magic Theatre

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With its white paper “Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century”, Project New Media Literacies (NML) presents a theoretical framework laying the foundation for the innovative learning tools it is now creating. One of the ideas put forth in the paper - and now being explored through the production and testing - is that in order for students to become full participants in the 21st century, it is necessary to design opportunities for learning that integrate current practices shaping the production and flow of cultural material. One of the most influential and ubiquitous of these practices is appropriation, or, as NML defines it, “the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content”.

Working to demonstrate the educational value of sampling and remixing as skills, NML is currently involved in a dynamic collaboration that crosses many disciplines. NML Principal Investigator **Henry Jenkins**, Creative Manager **Anna van Someren**, and Research Assistants **Deb Lui** and **Andres Lombana** are working with Melville scholar and CMS affiliate professor **Wyn Kelley** and theatre director Ricardo Pitts-Wiley to create a new kind of teachers guide. The multi-media, web-based guide will offer educators concrete tools to teach traditional literature by exploring interpretations of Herman Melville’s classic novel *Moby-Dick*.

Central to this teachers guide is the work of Ricardo Pitts-Wiley, Director of Mixed Magic Theatre in Pawtucket RI. Pitts-Wiley works with local youth to first read and then remix the work of Herman Melville. Immersing themselves in the novel and making connections between Ahab’s journey and their own, Pitts-Wiley and his students recently created a multi-layered play called *Moby Dick: Then and Now*. A remix of narrative themes, the new play is also a remix of language, as it mixes passages from the original Melville with samples of urban slang provided by the youth.

The production team of Project NML has been documenting the processes of Pitts-Wiley and his young cast since early 2007 by videotaping readings, rehearsals, and interviews. With so much time spent together, the relationship has become a rich one; the NML camera crew stayed late after rehearsals, hashed out plot points and rewrites with Pitts-Wiley, and conducted more personal interviews with teen cast members in their homes.

Professor Kelley first brought Pitts-Wiley and his theatre to Jenkins’ attention, having met him through the Melville Society she co-founded. Kelley sees Pitts-Wiley as a remixer in the very spirit of Melville, pointing to the many voices and styles employed in *Moby-Dick*. In interviews conducted by Kelley, teen cast member Rudy Cabrera describes his perspective on the remix as it functions in the world of hip-hop, and defines a good remix as “when other artists understand the original track and they debate on it adding their own flavor, their own lyrics, like a response.” Like Kelly, Cabrera sees Pitts-Wiley as an artist remixing Melville, but he compares it to the way his favorite rappers set their own lyrics over beats from an original track – new versions with implicit and explicit references, or “shout-outs,” to the original. These are the kinds of cross-generational, interdisciplinary perspectives that encourage new pathways for participation and understanding in the 21st century.

Project New Media Literacies’ *Moby-Dick* teachers’ guide is currently in development and will be available online at the Project NML website in 2009.

For more information on the New Media Literacies Project, visit their website at <http://www.projectnml.org>.