INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS "THE TECH FIX" TRANSCRIPT
Henry Jenkins (4:34)

We learn by failing. We learn by making mistakes and doing something over and doing it better. When our schools make failure fatal, they cut themselves off from the most vital process of learning there is, that is, learning through our own mistakes, thinking critically at our own behavior. And in schools, let's face it, failure is fatal. You know, you don't do well enough on a standardized test, and you are out. I don't think we can afford to give up on schools, but I think schools are increasingly cut themselves off from the main flow of the society. More learning, I think, is going on outside of school now than inside of school. Kids are learning, those kids who are lucky enough to have access to the computers and to the Internet and game systems and mobile phones, are learning in all kinds of ways all day long. There's a rich cultural ecology around learning that's taking place. And schools, by and large, have barricaded themselves away from that. If you go to a school, no Facebook, no MySpace, and you know, no Youtube, no Wikipedia, the sort of basic platforms young people are drawing on to engage with the world, to express themselves, to seek out new content, to connect socially with other people are blocked from the classroom. So those kids who have been immersed in that environment shed their technology and shed their best ways of learning as they enter the schoolhouse gates. Schools are bureaucracies, right? They are based on fixed relationships between teachers and learners, bureaucratic structures and regulations, one-sized fits all, standardized curriculum, standardized testing. The Internet is based on collective intelligence. We learn from each other, and in a world of collective intelligence, nobody knows everything, everyone knows some things, and what any individual member knows is accessible to the social network as a whole. School is still based on the notion of the autonomous learner. That is, most forms of collaboration in the classroom were regarded as cheating. So, there's a fundamental ideology at stake here between the kinds of social structures that are emerging online and the kinds of rigid governmental structures that have shaped education, at least for most of my lifetime. They've wired the classroom, then disabled the computer. They've opened the school up to new kinds of learning and then told teachers, "don't go anywhere near it." And even if you bought the scenario, the danger scenario that kids are at risk if they enter, say, MySpace, wouldn't we better of as a society if we had educators who knew about the risks and benefits of that and how to manage that risk, talking frankly to kids about what they needed to do to be safe and ethical online than saying "this doesn't belong in school, we're going to close the schoolhouse gates and you're going to have to deal with it on your own." You know, we talked for 20 years about the digital divide, which was about how do we ensure that every kid in America has access to network computer technologies. What we now need to focus on is who has access to the cultural and social experiences that emerge around those platforms. And that sense of empowerment, entitlement, desire to participate, those are things that are emerging almost organically in some homes, in those homes where people are spending a lot of time online and adults are knowledgeable and helping young people sort through their experience online. Now, we're at a point where some kids grow up immersed in social network sites, and YouTube, and Flickr and Twitter, who have acquired the skills at navigating through the digital space. And those kids have a habit of mind, a way of
processing information that is going to serve them well in school and that will serve them well in the workplace in the future. Those kids who haven't had those experiences are being locked out. And the problem is that when we lock those experiences out of school as well, there's no way for them to catch up. Schools are our best tool for allowing those kids who are being left behind to acquire the skills and the sense of self-confidence that will allow them to more meaningfully participate in another environment. I think that schools will do better by exposing kids to the way that they're going to be thinking, and working, and creating, and collaborating in the future than protecting them from it. Because where are they going to learn those skills, where are they going to master that knowledge except through schools? So, yes, I think if you want to send a kid to a summer camp where there's no technology and they spend time in nature, and they swim in Walden Pond, you know, fine, but if that's your primary mode of education, I'm a little suspicious of it. Not because it shouldn't be an option that parents have available, but it's an option that I would recommend against because it leaves kids disarmed and falling further and further behind in the skills sets that they are going to need for them to function as adults in the 21st Century.