

Introduction

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Media Literacy in Multiple Contexts

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Media literacy education seeks to integrate the various texts and contexts for critical media analysis and production into the culture of schooling. It expands the concept of alphabetic literacy and orality to include a wide variety of visual, moving image, simulated and digital forms. In the process, media education conceptualizes new forms of media within the historical, cultural, social, economic and environmental contexts of traditional literacies. The routine, daily uses of digital devices shape human communication in a symbiotic relationship between form, content and context. As networked devices expand communication to a vast international audience, the mastery of contemporary literacy skills becomes increasingly complex.

This volume of «Comunicar» explores the global adoption of networked, digital literacy practices across geographic, cultural and social borders. The research here provides diverse examples of media education in a wide range of learning environments around the world. In the process themes and patterns related to the global reach of new literacy and communication practices emerge.

In particular, the studies in this volume imply that a sophisticated level of insight and experience is needed to understand the nuances of cross-cultural media texts and dialogues in a highly mobile and globally –connected world. The concept of cultural competency– the rich, diverse and complex strategies needed to communicate with global cultures and to transcend cultural boundaries – is a theme that surfaces throughout this volume.

The changing relationship between critical media reception and production is another thread that emerges in these studies. As explored here, the relationship between the skills and knowledge that are necessary to master both critical media analysis and critical media production are not entirely clear and direct. This disjunction can create problems for educators who hope to integrate new forms of «reading» and «writing» into the classroom. Fortunately, the articles open opportunities for educators to apply and integrate the findings and reflections found here to innovative media literacy education in both formal and informal learning environments.

It can be argued that research related to the integration and impact of new media literacy practices in the formal learning environment is still undertheorized and provisional. As a result, research about media literacy is often represented by small samples, cases or field tests that focus on the uses of specific devices and their relationship to learning. In the process, the research also reveals creative ethnographic research processes such as action research that aligns with the participatory practices of youth media production while testing a range of methodologies for the study of new media and education. The

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articles in this volume reflect the range of methods used to study media education. More importantly, they contribute to a growing body of research that can be used to frame international and intercultural digital literacy practices within the context of formal schooling.

Access to new literacy practices is increasingly seen as a basic human right and a necessary condition for social and civic participation in democratic societies. In this volume, Manuel Area (University of La Laguna, Spain) and Teresa Pessoa (University of Coimbra, Portugal) propose a model for developing new literacies for citizenship in a digital society. The authors build their model on two main pillars: the various dimensions of literacy; and the related competences needed to participate in a digital world.

British scholars Alex Kendall and Julian McDougall (University of Birmingham, UK) raise important questions about the relationships between literacy, media literacy and media education. In this article, the prominent focus on «the media» is seen as a barrier to critical literacy practices. The authors' insights into the relationships between audiences, texts and technologies raise important questions about the pedagogical practices needed to support media education.

Alfonso Gutiérrez (University of Valladolid, Spain) and Kathleen Tyner (The University of Texas at Austin, USA) explore the role that formal education can play in addressing contemporary digital literacy skills and practices. The authors warn that reductionist interpretations of media literacy that focus on applied technical competencies with devices, hardware and software have the potential to severely limit media literacy education. They highlight the need to include a broader and deeper analysis of the social uses, attitudes, and values associated with new media tools, texts and practices.

Erin McCloskey (University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA) expands on the topic of teacher professional development in her investigation of foreign language instruction in online learning communities. Her research supports theories about the way that online learning can be used to support intercultural communicative competence in contemporary teacher development programs.

Roberto Aparici (National University of Digital Education, UNED, Spain) and Marco Silva (University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) analyse the way that new media allows every citizen to become a unique media hub with the ability to collect and distribute media to audiences on a micro-to-macro level. According to the authors, this new communication ecosystem, suggests a society of communicators where everyone feeds with his or her creations and in the process, shares individual and collective knowledge.



They propose a «feed-feed» communication model based on the individual and collective construction of knowledge over the traditional «feed-back» model.

Australian scholar Michael Dezuanni (Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane) collaborates with scholar Andres Monroy-Hernandez (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA) to study the uses of an innovative, participatory online environment to promote intercultural collaboration and understanding. Their study of the Scratch Online Community exemplifies the ability for users in online communities to move beyond parochial cultural attitudes in order to acquire the kind of engaged cultural competency that results in authentic learning.

Guillermo Orozco (University of Guadalajara, México), Eva Navarro (Babilonische European Research Group, University of Amsterdam, Holland) and Agustín G. Matilla (University of Valladolid, Spain) analyse audience engagement with both old and new media, and the multiple, interactive processes and discourses used across languages, formats and technologies as users create and send media. They stress the need to differentiate the existing widespread consumption and connectivity from the authentic, horizontal and creative participation of the audiences.

Joan Ferrés Prats (University Pompeu Fabra, Spain) and Alejandro Piscitelli (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina) provide some criteria to guide media education in the contemporary digital communication environment. They offer a coordinated concept of the dimensions and indicators needed to define new media competence. The authors propose six major dimensions: languages; technology; reception and interaction processes; production and dissemination processes; ideology and values, and aesthetics. These dimensions inform the design of the learning environment within the context of participatory culture. It combines critical thinking with critical expression and envisions the resulting support for personal autonomy as a pathway to social and cultural participation.

In addition to general reflections on «the media», the volume also explores the conventions and practices of specific media. University of London scholars John Potter (Institute of Education) and Shakuntala Banaji (London School of Economics) focus their research on the uses of the blog as a self-reflective learning tool for students. In the process, they discover new areas of research related to online identity creation, project-based learning and student preferences for digital literacy practices in the contemporary learning environment.

The history of literacy reveals that media can be repurposed in ways that defy the original intentions of its producers. In a case study of a student-produced news story about sex trafficking, Elisabeth (Lissa) Soep, Senior Producer and Researcher Director at Youth Radio-Youth Media International in (Oakland, California, USA) reveals the way that media texts can acquire a «digital afterlife» in digital distribution networks. Her study raises important questions about the ethical and pedagogical challenges that confront media producers, audiences, practitioners and educators in the contemporary media landscape.

The articles in this volume demonstrate that in an age of ubiquitous and pervasive digital devices, literacy practices are increasingly global and mobile, altering human communication, social norms, and connecting cultures across time and distance in ways that are both subtle and profound.