Kathy Sanford
Theresa Rogers
Maureen Kendrick  *Editors*

# Everyday Youth Literacies

## Critical Perspectives for New Times

Springer

# Cultural Studies and Transdisciplinarity in Education

Volume 1

**Editors**
Aaron Koh
National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Singapore

Victoria Carrington
School of Education & Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom

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*Editors*

Kathy Sanford
University of Victoria
Victoria
British Columbia
Canada

Theresa Rogers
Department of Language
   and Literacy Education
University of British Columbia
Vancouver
British Columbia
Canada

Maureen Kendrick
Department of Language
   and Literacy Education
University of British Columbia
Vancouver
British Columbia
Canada

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# Foreword

*Youth Literacies in New Times: Everywhere Everyday* is a much-welcomed collection of essays. In this brave and courageous work, the scholars assembled here challenge the conventions about literacy education. They provide a great sense of new possibilities amid a sense of educational crisis. To gain a sense of what is fresh about this approach, one need go no farther than the reference to *youth literacies* in the title of this book. The book begins with the assumption that youth are already literate, and literate in multiple ways, with many rich instances of these literacies presented in the pages that follow.

Each chapter offers another aspect and setting for these literacies, drawn from the work of these authors with the young. Together, author and the young have explored ways to build on these literacies. In the process, the authors set out the extent of, as well as the current limits to, the decoding and encoding that comes of logging on and tuning into global systems of image and text. They make clear how such literacies make up the lives of the young, outside and inside of schools. They help us to face the challenge of keeping these literacies moving forward in the hands of the young, adding not just to their educational value, but to the part that such literacies can play in making a better world. And as much as it is the young who are immediately present here, on so many pages, they are placed in conversation with, in more than one place, the likes of Judith Butler, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, as a way of extending how we think about these literacies as expressions of identity, social structures, and language, more broadly.

The book is certainly a credit, in the first instance, to its editors, Kathy Sanford, Theresa Rogers, and Maureen Kendrick, who first brought together these education researchers at the University of British Columbia in June 2010. For this initial discussion of the issues and studies, I had the pleasure of joining my once and lasting UBC colleagues, as well as the other invited scholars who had travelled to the campus. The editors have now assembled this group again, within these pages. Here, they make present, through their work, this sense of literacies everywhere.

This sense of *everywhere* is another of the radical starting points for their collective work. The universal presence of these literacies offers a second radical starting point for this collection. For too long, education scholars have regarded literacy far too provincially, as if we are employed in nothing larger than advancing the

nation-state. Literacy has, of course, always been everywhere a global cultural phenomenon, even if the schools have tended to restrict that concept to the inclusion of, in Canadian readers, an exotic folktale from Malaysia or Kenya in the school reader.

The literacies of the young, on the other hand, are now increasingly plugged into global networks through shared platforms and applications. The young are already everywhere, with it left wide open what that larger presence can mean for learning about the world, and for contributing to the meaning of the world, in these oh-so-new times. This online connectedness is not everyone's experience, but it is for an increasingly large proportion of the young, otherwise known as the net generation. In the United States, where I work, some fifteen percent of the population continues, distressingly, to live below the poverty line in this land of abundance, and yet it appears that 93 % of all teenagers had a computer in their home and went online in 2012, according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (even as fifteen percent have been the target of "online meanness" through social media sites). In Africa, where the internet may still only reach sixteen percent of the population, the Internet World Stats website reports that, in 2012, there were still 51 million Facebook users.

This collection reflects this global, mobile aspect in so many ways. It is to be found in the Ugandan solar-powered access to the networked world of information; among homeless Canadian youth going public with their street literacies; with a journalism club in Kenya linked to students in Canada; it infuses the American students doing Bitstrip cartoon responses to a novel online; it can be heard in the talk about PlayStation in a South African township or creating captioned images on HIV/AIDS in KwaZulu-Natal; it is there among the young Canadian Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer or Allied filmmakers saying no to hate; it shows up in proposals, in the UK, for teaching primary students to tweet; and it appears in learning the laws of the world, if only in the World of Warcraft.

Across these locations, the book makes clear how common themes and machines are subject to local cultural adaptations, much as the VJ in a Uganda Shack Video Hall, as described in this book, does a voice-over interpretation of the Hollywood movie everyone is watching. The authors bring to the fore the global scale of the divisions and inequities, poverty and illness, boundaries and prejudices that it falls to education to address, both in teaching about the world, and in thinking about how to act on the world. For me, what marks the new times here is how effectively the authors manage to shift the education researchers' perspective away from the traditional literacy concerns over improving test-scores, rather than the technologies of communication, after all, been with us for some. The students may well have an expertise with these new systems that elude many of us. But what is new about the times may well be a recognition that this expertise among literacies is where we start to work with the young.

To that end, this collection allows us to hear the voices of the young, in their aspirations and ambitions, as they live out the bounds and boundaries of their lives. They are not speaking here from the far more typical starting point for work on literacy, often described as the deficit model. The young are not suffering here from a want of literacy—which we try to address through various formulaic teaching

strategies, from SQR3 to high-interest/low-vocabulary novels—but instead reflect a capacity to speak out and take on, to decode and encode, things that matter. In this, they call into question high school test-results that reflect, according to the U.S. National Assessment of Educational Progress dating back to 1971, a stalling of the gains made in earlier grades (and a decline in literacy among seventeen-year-olds in the twelfth grade). We have here a starting point for rethinking what we make of the world in the name of fostering new literacies. We can see here that what needs remediating is the decoding and encoding of norms that are seen as something other than given and fixed.

Yet this book is not about the progress of nations. It demonstrates forms of research aimed at contributing to the lives of the participants rather than extracting data from them. The significance at issue is in research designs that make a difference in the lives of those poorly served by educational systems that continue to falter in the face of poverty, racism, homophobia, and sexism. The chapters that follow reveal research and participant helping each other to stand up and speak out about education, through various media, including, given what you have in hand, an old-school book for new times. Together, those represented here make something of literacies' performance, finding the queer possibilities of these literacies to work against norms that judge some marginal rather than, as they are here, at the center of text and meaning.

Yet the contributors to this collection are also refreshingly candid about shortcomings in what the young make of their literacies. They are not here simply to celebrate the literacies of the young, for they recognize the dangers, excesses, and thoughtlessness to which such technologies lend themselves. As researchers and educator, the authors are prepared to challenge the young, and themselves, in thinking about how to work toward a more critical take on the world.

Teaching with the new literacies involves, to take but one example from the book, the literacies of civic engagement and ethical strategizing in organizing people to some end, beginning with videogames but with an eye to how this approach moves out into the real world. Encouraging reflection on, and an understanding of, such principled engagement among students allows teachers to contribute to what is *new* about the times, while keeping present literacy's traditional value as an instrument of democracy. This collection demonstrates as much by showing how the young, with the help of those whose work is represented here, find ways of directing their literacies against the wrongs and injustices within their lives, through forms of public engagement and pedagogy.

To catch sight of the advances made by this collection, one need only look back to earlier work on the new literacies, say, a book I worked on thirty years ago, with a *new literacy* title and theme. I, too, wanted to draw attention to those who were in their classrooms were changing the conventions of literacy instruction. This was when literacy was thought of as singular and what was *new* involved nothing more new than having primary-grade students write their way into literacy. Ruth Fletcher, the teacher I was teaching with (and I was studying, as a new Ph.D. returning to teach the fifth grade), used to step into the supply room each morning, where the rest of us were lined up to copy worksheets for our classes' lessons, and simply pick

up a stack of blank paper to take to her grade-two classroom. Her students made books of their picture-and-word stories; they went on, with our help, to stage movies of those stories. And if their stories railed against any domesticating or grading of their literacy, they did not fail to reproduce gender stereotypes, which gave us pause.

So while some similarities persist, the *Youth Literacies* collection goes much farther afield. It asks larger, more critical questions around a broader range of students, settings, and issues. What is striking about it is how much care is given to how to both empower the young, in the making of media statements, and how to be thoughtful and critical of that making. In this, the contributors are admirably facing the educational challenge of these new times. They are there, with the young, working on an appreciation of what these literacies entail and afford, and they are asking, in chapter after chapter, that we see these literacies as having a greater purpose, and able to serve greater ends, than we have in the past. That purpose and end have everything to do with, it seems to me, adding to what matters in the meaning of the world and acting on it, much as happens in what follows here.

John Willinsky

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# Contributors

**Stella Achen**  Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

**Sarah Bonsor Kurki**  University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada

**Victoria Carrington**  University of East Anglia, Norwich, England

**Walter Chemjor**  Kabarak University, Nakuru, Kenya

**Margaret Early**  University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

**Chelsey Hague**  University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

**Maureen Kendrick**  University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

**Diane Lapp**  San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA

**Polo Lemphane**  University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

**Margaret Mackey**  University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

**Lori McIntosh**  University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

**Cheryl McLean**  Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA

**Claudia Mitchell**  McGill University, Montreal, Canada

**Bonny Norton**  University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

**George Ladaah Openjuru**  Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

**Mastin Prinsloo**  University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

**Theresa Rogers**  University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

**Jennifer Rowsell**  Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, Canada

**Kathy Sanford**  University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada

**Sara Schroeter**  University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

**Julian Sefton-Green**  London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK

**Amanda Wager**  University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

# Chapter 1
# An Introduction to Everyday Youth Literacies: Critical Perspectives in New Times

**Kathy Sanford, Theresa Rogers and Maureen Kendrick**

In recent decades literacy has taken on a new face; in their "new" pluralized forms, literacies are proliferating in all aspects of youths' lives across the porous boundaries of homes, communities and schools, across diverse geographic sites and locations, and across variations in capacities, resources, and access. These broader conceptions of literacies are challenging traditional narrower and less critical understandings of literacy that have been largely limited to the ability of individuals to read and write printed texts (e.g., Coiro et al. 2008). Newer conceptions of literacy take into account sociocultural, ideological, technological and spatial influences on youth literacy practices. As youth claim aspects of these new literacies as their own domain, the meanings, purposes, and intentions of their literacy practices are shifting. Traditional notions of "literacy" are necessarily being reinterpreted in relation to these new literacy practices that continue to emerge from and influence youth.

Indeed, these "new literacies" are being taken up by today's youth in ways that could not have been imagined even a few decades ago, and are still not well understood by educators, parents, and policy-makers today. Discontinuities and tensions across traditional print-based literacy practices prevalent in schools and new youth literacies continue, with an unabated insistence by many policy makers and educators on valuing alphabetic and print texts and ignoring others as evidenced through persistent accountability measures such as standardized assessment practices. In other cases, "new literacies" are taken up in more formal settings but in limited ways that do not necessarily transform learning opportunities in any meaningful ways. And where there are new literacy practices in evidence, it is often in well-resourced communities.

K. Sanford (✉)
University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada
e-mail: ksanford@uvic.ca

T. Rogers · M. Kendrick
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada
e-mail: theresa.rogers@ubc.ca

M. Kendrick
e-mail: maureen.kendrick@ubc.ca

Despite, in many cases, the lack of understanding or support for new literacies, youth in diverse geographic locations and sites are engaging in literacy practices qualitatively different from those of previous generations, practices that the authors of this volume carefully engage in and theorize in ways that preserve the complexity of the youth productions and outcomes. As societies face a crisis in public education, pressured by consumer culture, commercialization, and conflicting values, the youth literacy practices described here offer an alternative perspective. They illustrate rapidly changing youth participation across formal and less formal educational contexts, in various socioeconomic contexts, and across geographical spaces.

Viewing new literacies through critical, sociocultural lenses as well as psychological and economic frames refocuses our attention on the significance of literacies developed by youth for their own purposes and needs. Major technological, economic, political, and educational shifts in the past decade have all impacted conceptions of literacy and ways in which youth understand and develop literacies to participate in larger cultural contexts (Jenkins 2006) and insert themselves into the adult world. Over ten years ago, Moje (2002) commented on "the *lack* of attention to the literacy processes, practices, and development" of youth, and this lack largely persists today, making "invisible the literacy practices of a large segment of the world's population" across local and global contexts. She adds, "further attention needs to be given to ways in which youth navigate, manipulate, and are dominated by the images and icons of popular culture, media, Internet web pages, chat rooms, and other technologies" (pp. 100–101).

For purposes of continuity and clarity, we define "youth literacies" in this volume as ways young people engage in the world using a wide array of digital, multimodal media to connect with significant people and issues throughout the world. Youth literacies are fluid, hybrid, diverse, and multiple, and include the ability to interpret and produce a wide range of communicative texts, using not only written texts but also identifying themselves through art, music, dress, body art, movement, gesture and film to claim power and space in youth cultural sites and broader society.

Before the emergence of mass media, personal and social identities were seen as more fixed—they were mainly determined by education, family, gender, community, ethnic group and religion (Kellner 1995); however, the emergence of mass media has contributed to new forms and sites of identity positionings and construction. Media culture in the form of printed books, newspapers, magazines, movies, radios, video games, and the range of new digital and on-line genres and sites provides individuals with abundant materials and resources to re-think and re-shape their personal and social identity. As many contemporary cultural theorists contend, social and cultural identity, agency, and discursive subjective positioning are both situated and fluid (e.g., Davies and Harré 2007; Holland et al. 2001). In the context of new literacies practices, youth often explicitly or implicitly discursively position themselves within texts they create and re-create, using a range of multimodal resources, as they are continually constructing and negotiating their identities (e.g. Rogers et al., this volume).

Our collective stories of youth literacies stand in contrast to those conceptions of youth literacy aimed at remediating youth "at risk" or "with low literacy skills" that focus on increasing more traditional reading skills and test scores. Instead, we argue that the array of youth literacy practices need further attention and more nuanced perspectives that recognize the uniqueness of the various ways they engage in the world—building on and connecting abilities, attitudes, and understandings associated with new literacies to more traditional "schooled" conceptions of literacy (i.e., reading and writing print text).

## Mapping the Landscape of Youth Literacies in New Times

As Julian Sefton-Green (this volume) notes, "literacy" has been used as a way of summing up competence in a new domain (e.g., digital literacy, emotional literacy). However, "youth literacies" as referred to here focus on the actual *literacy practices* of young people. Our aim is to contribute to deeper understandings of ways in which youth connect to their local and global worlds. Youth literacies draw on a wide array of discursive tools, communication affordances, and new technological media to enable complex multimodal texts to emerge and be shared. These new literacies practices often change and subvert the dominant educational agenda as youth engage in sophisticated interactions with a wide array of texts, both "reading" and "writing" new texts in new ways. These "new" literacies are made possible, in part, by the rapid development of multimodal devices enabling youth to access and create ideas in many forms, including image, gesture, movement, music, speech, and writing across print and digital media (Kress 2003; Street 2012). The affordances of digital and technological tools have also enabled youth to create texts in social groups, rather than as individual activities (Sefton-Green 2006), learning tacitly through interaction and absorption rather than by direct instruction (Thomas and Seely Brown 2011). Youth learn to manipulate and remix these complex multimodal texts through interactive use, for purposes defined by them, to communicate and share ideas in ways that are accessible to their peers—often through the texts of popular culture, such as lyrics, poetry, games, images, and chat/blog sites.

Researchers and educators, including those represented here, draw on and blend a range of larger theoretical frameworks in order to better understand and explicate these complex practices of youth literacies; these frameworks include cultural studies, critical pedagogy, semiotic/multimodal theories, sociolinguistics, cultural geography, and post-structural perspectives. Contemporary perspectives of critical youth studies, media studies, New Literacy Studies, and sociolinguistic theories of scale deepen these analyses of the particular kinds of youth participation in literacy and media practices across a range of available resources and geographical contexts.

## What's "New" about Youth Literacies in New Times?

While the authors in this volume address the many cultural, educational, and political factors that continue to shape the ways literacies are understood and used, they also recognize that it is twenty-first century youth who are best positioned to enhance our understandings of the complexities of new literacies in new times. Youth are moving into spaces traditionally occupied by "experts" as they develop sophisticated understandings of diverse literacies, and create and respond to multimodal forms of texts. Because these spaces, affordances, and skills are known (and often developed) by the youth themselves, adults frequently learn from them; roles are, in some instances, reversed. Youth are now not relying solely or even predominantly on school to learn literacy skills; instead they glean much about communication through participation in informal spaces, both on-line and in face-to-face social sites. As a result, there is often a disconnect between what youth know, can do, and want to learn, and the requirements and expectations of parents, teachers and schools. There is also an increased blurring of education, entertainment and civic engagement as the play-work connection weaves in multiple iterations of youth literacies, from zines, videogames, wikis and blogs, a connection that often includes youths' insistence on being taken seriously as they engage in meaningful social issues.

As mobile devices become more and more ubiquitous, they enable collection, sharing, and creating in instantaneous and seamless ways, permitting youth to take control of what they learn, how they create, and with whom they share and interact. They are able to choose what they want to say and the medium best suited to their message and audience. Youth using new literacies can, as suggested by Powell (1996), "challenge us to look beyond our limited cultural assumptions and world views… that not only legitimate students' voices but allow them to see that they are part of the continuing human dialogue, and that their lives can make a difference" (p. 6). As is illustrated in these chapters, the affordances of new tools and technologies enable collection, manipulation, appropriation, re-use, copying, mash-ups, interweaving, and collaboration as well as the creation of original individual texts to convey messages. Some of these messages indicate youth resistance to dominant and exclusionary cultural discourses and discontent with hegemonic policy and practices, as well as their desire to use new literacies to engage in the world.

This volume is especially focused on the diverse sites of youth engagement in new literacies. Unlike opportunities of previous generations of learners, there are many sites for learning literacy and many teachers. Youth also work with and learn from each other, both face-to-face and at a distance. Boundaries of space and place are shifting through ingenious uses of digital technologies, enabling youth to distribute their knowledge and share with each other around the globe. Learning new literacies is now more routine and is supported by affiliations of communities of practice with similar goals and intentions, and often youth are more interested in collaborating than competing. Global learning networks, enabled through continuously refined technological advances as well as the desire to communicate and interact across geographical spaces, has the potential to create opportunities for

dialogue between youth of diverse cultural, class, and racial boundaries, enhancing the possibilities for broader awareness and acceptance of difference. Multimodal texts and multiple, collaborative authors, each refining and sharing their areas of expertise in confluent ways, in conceptual, artistic, structural, synthesizing and critical ways, collapse time and space in ways of communicating to broad diverse audiences spanning locations near and far.

While we welcome the advent of these new forms of youth literacy practices, we also recognize the many contradictions and even dangers in this new landscape. Contradictions include ongoing tensions between alternative sites of meaning-making and the commodification and appropriation of many new media spaces, the problems of overstating binaries between new and old literacies, between informal and formal learning and youth and adult literacies, and the risk of celebrating all new literacies without recognizing the risks, such as when media sites are used for various kinds of public harassment or oppression or are otherwise exclusionary. We are particularly cognizant of the differential resourcing within and across geographic sites, and the need to scale up understandings of local practices in relation to global forces. In this volume, then, authors bring their various experiences and knowledge of working with youth and new literacies to carefully describe, analyze and critique the potentials and possibilities of youth literacies in new times.

## Youth Literacies in New Times: Perspectives in this Volume

The affordances of new literacies, drawing on digital tools and multimodal media, offer new critical conceptualizations of consuming, creating and authoring texts for both youth and researchers of digital literacies. Authors in this volume note that youth are engaging in complex interpretive practices, not unlike with print texts, which provide new avenues for developing knowledge. However, as noted by Prinsloo and Lemphane (this volume), researchers need to attend to both micro- and macro-level contexts to make local practices intelligible by attending to different and complex models and ways of relating. The affordances of youth literacies also assume a social aspect to creation, where many authors contribute to a text, where knowledge is often distributed, where already existing texts are remixed and manipulated and where social groups can be drawn from both local and global communities.

New possibilities emerge through the interweaving, juxtaposing, and spontaneous emergence of ideas generated in the spaces created through virtual and real-time conversations. The sociality of digital writing creates opportunities to collaborate and design texts not possible for individual endeavours. This remix of time, space, and production in informal settings suggests the need for shifts in formal educational settings and policy to encourage use of new literacies for deep engagement and participation in meaningful local and global youth projects. Collaborative literacy constructions created by youth, often sophisticated and powerful texts, need to be valued and respected for their quality, serious intent, and influence on their peers

and society more generally. These collaborative constructions, however, while sharing similar ways in which youth adopt new literacies and address challenges, also reveal gaps that exist across diverse locations, and point to the ways in which youth exist in vastly different contexts and conditions.

Within these participatory and collaborative new literacy environments, youth often take on particular subject positions in relation to the discourses of their peers or the larger society they are addressing. These positions entail opportunities for social or political engagements and resistances. As Rogers, Schroeter, Wager and Hague (this volume) note, "youth are continuously engaged in analyzing their social and cultural contexts, both recognizing and resisting power (including that of the researchers) in various ways." Researchers such as McIntosh (this volume), therefore, caution against being only celebratory about youth productions and argue for the need for increased criticality in informal settings and in school curricula.

As creators and participants in new sites and practices of literacy, especially under-resourced contexts, youth exhibit particular kinds of subjective positions and forms of agency, often working in spaces that sit at the interface of local and global contexts, and at times work toward democratizing and socio-political goals. Youth in these contexts invest their identities in the creative texts they produce through their use of multiple modalities and languages (Kendrick et al., this volume) and seek to gain voice and power over their education and their lives in complex and unanticipated ways. The sociopolitical significance of placed resources and new literacy practices in shaping one's learning are significant, as "these connections between identity, literacy, and learning influence youth's future life opportunities, their position in the social order, and social relations, at large" (Ashcraft 2012). As called for by UNESCO (2000), education is a human right and it is recognized that education enables people to improve their lives and transform their societies (Norton, this volume). The diverse ways in which young people learn to use literacy and language across global contexts point to the ongoing and pervasive inequities they continue to face and influences how they are positioned in society and impacts their access to further literacy and language learning.

New literacies as they are taken up by youth using multimodal forms and diverse interactive tools can serve to further democratize education, challenging the exclusivity of traditional literacy in both majority world and Western world contexts. New literacies have the potential to enable youth (and researchers/educators) to read the world (Freire 1985) as they seek change through their use of multiple modes of literacy. Youth are using new literacies to make an impact on the world through their words, images, and voices—written, spoken, and performed. Rather than seeking to change "literacy rates," they are attempting to make learning more meaningful and relevant to their lives, sharing with each other and across communities. At times, youth literacies can reach toward the emancipatory, seeking to recreate education as equitable and socially just, considering class, race, gender and sexuality, enabling increased access and use of the diverse literacies available across the world, and increasing various mobilities. At other times they fall short—reminding us of the profound challenges to equity in communities and societies. Nonetheless, youth are actively engaging in using literacies to understand diverse perspectives, to make

their opinions known, and to be understood in multiple contexts—requiring us all to continually examine our assumptions and to pay attention to youth learning and engagement with new literacies.

## Background and Overview of the Volume

The impetus for this collection of research-supported explorations of youth literacies came in 2011 when the editors successfully applied for a SSHRC-funded grant[1] and hosted a New Literacies Workshop on the University of British Columbia campus. The invited "new literacies" scholars shared their youth literacies research relating to contexts, affordances, challenges, and methodological issues; the ensuing conversations were stimulated by invited international scholars (Victoria Carrington, Mastin Prinsloo, Julian Sefton-Green, and John Willinsky) who shared their work in digital technologies and digital youth culture, media education, new technologies, informal learning, literacy and language in schools, institutions and in everyday use. Many of the research projects were located in diverse community sites spanning the globe, in particular connecting Canada with several African contexts. Other examples of research relating to school-based issues and innovations involving youth and youth literacies in Canadian contexts, shared at the 2011 New Literacies Workshop, can be found in the *Language and Literacy* eJournal Special Issue "New Literacies in Canadian Classrooms" (2013, 15(1)).

The book is divided into three parts: The chapters in Part One explore they ways youth engage in new literacies practices in diverse contexts in North America, specifically in Canadian informal youth contexts; Part Two addresses youth in African contexts engaging in new literacy practices, an emerging area of interest in youth literacies research. Part Three includes two chapters that, drawing on Canadian, American and British contexts, explore some of the tensions and challenges that arise with a new literacies framework. This final section reflects a broader goal of this volume—to identify some ways in which educators can begin to think about creative alternatives to the status quo by considering the possibilities and contradictions of engaging youth in new literacy practices.

The following questions are addressed in this volume: What are the challenges for youth, researchers and educators who use or facilitate learning about and through new literacies in a range of institutional and geographical sites? What can we learn about youth literacies from engaging with marginalized youth and documenting practices in under-resourced areas? How might we more fully embrace youth as knowledge producers as well as consumers, and as a generative force in a participatory culture? How might educators work with pedagogical curricula and designs that are at odds with the complex texts of youth literacies; what are implications for school literacy practices? How are language and literacy policies constructed, interpreted, and negotiated?

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[1] The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) is the federal research funding agency that promotes and supports postsecondary-based research and training in the humanities and social sciences.

We take up these critical questions in diverse international contexts, where researchers are providing vital leadership roles in exploring the connections among local and global new literacy practices, defining what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century, and disseminating their work with a broad range of educators and policy makers. Many of the chapters are grounded in cases that we hope will resonate with issues faced by researchers and educators in a diverse array of contexts.

## Part I: New Literacy Practices of Youth in Diverse Contexts: Knowledge, Engagement, Resistance and Critique

Part I of this volume, *New Literacies Practices of Youth in Diverse Contexts*: *Knowledge, Engagement, Resistance and Critique* draws on a series of studies in which researchers work closely with youth ranging in age from early teens into their early twenties, in various less formal settings, as they participate in literacy and media practices. Chapter authors describe the knowledge youth mobilize across modalities, the complex interpretive processes they enact across multimodal texts and platforms, and the ways their engagements with literacy, arts and media consumption and production become sites of ethical, critical and socio-political engagement, resistance and critique. Taken together, these chapters describe the everyday complexities of youth engagement in new literacies and the importance of naming both the productive and more complicated processes and outcomes.

Margaret Mackey begins her chapter, "Narrative Interpretation: Tacit and Explicit, Analogue and Digital" (Chap. 2) by arguing that learning in the digital environment is often tacit, as is narrative interpretation in analogue modes. Drawing on a study of 12 university students, she illustrates the crossover capacities across their readings, viewings, enactments and interpretations of a novel, a film, and a videogame. As she argues: "The points of comparison between these literacy activities, old and new, analogue and digital, are striking in their similarity, and involve activities that recede to a point of tacit awareness as automaticity in processing is achieved." Mackey notes that the similarities are important to understand as educators and youth navigate the world of new literacies.

In Chap. 3, "Videogame Literacies: Purposeful Civic Engagement for 21st Century Youth Learning," Kathy Sanford and Sarah Bonsor Kurki not only build upon the idea that complex narrative is a strong component of the multimedia texts of videogames, but that immersion into video-gaming also supports the development of abilities to strategize and solve problems, take on leadership, and engage in ethical decision-making. Based on a five-year longitudinal study of 11 adolescents, Sanford and Bonsor Kurki argue that these experiences influence the sophistication of the literacies and attitudes of the participants, as well as their potential for engagement as future citizens: As they state, "It is this ability to see the world through multiple perspectives, to seek alternative approaches, to critically question actions

and values, and to respond thoughtfully to diverse views of the game and of the world that we feel is needed for meaningful civic engagement in twenty-first century society."

The fourth chapter by Rogers, Schroeter, Wager and Hauge, "Public Pedagogies of Street-entrenched Youth: New Literacies, Identity and Social Critique," is premised on the notion that youth—in this case street youth—can teach us, despite living in precarity, about how and why they engage in various kinds of new literacies and media production as forms of participation in public life. The authors critically analyze interviews of street youth engaged in visual arts, poetry, blogging, zining, theatre and film to understand their various identity positions, resistances, and critical engagements. The authors emphasize the extent to which the youth are actively engaged in these "public pedagogies," but also acknowledge the challenges to they face in inscribing themselves into public discourses and caution against holding youth solely responsible for enacting political change.

In the fifth and last chapter of this section, entitled "My film will change the world…or something": Youth Media Production as "Social Text", McIntosh describes a two-year case study of six youth as they negotiated various societal discourses in their attempts to represent queerness and homophobia through digital media production. Echoing the previous chapter, she cautions against glorifying youth production as acts of resistance. Noting that many of the films made by the youth in a summer "boot camp" for filmmaking reify social discourses, she calls for more critical work in curricula and pedagogy to disrupt heteronormativity in educational spaces. Not without risk of failure, these curricula would extend their focus beyond the skills of digital media, to include critical counter narrative tools to represent queerness and to interrogate the neoliberal discourses of assimilation and individualism.

While youth described here exhibit remarkable fluency and rich intellectual, artistic, ethical, civic and critical engagements drawing on the tools, modes, and resources of new literacies, some also struggle to inscribe themselves in cultural and political discourses in large and small public sites. In this work with youth there is risk of overly celebratory and reifying discourses, complicating the storylines that promote new possibilities of self-representation, affordances, and access, while making visible the need for increased criticality in the formations of new educational curricula and policies. Several of these themes are extended, elaborated and resituated the Part II.

## Part II: Youth Literacy Practices in African Contexts

In Part II, *Youth Literacy Practices in African Contexts,* the authors examine youth literacies in diverse contexts in Africa, in under-resourced and under-researched sites that have been largely neglected in literacy research. Together, these authors highlight how youth take up new digital literacies as "placed resources" (Prinsloo 2005) that work in situated, context specific ways. Their studies emphasize how

the digital presents both opportunities and challenges when taken up by youth both in and out of school contexts. Claudia Mitchell's chapter, the first in this section, transitions from Part I with its focus on youth participatory research and their representations of difficult knowledge in HIV&AIDS discourses in South Africa. The next four chapters are careful examinations of the relationships between the local and global in a range of other African contexts.

In Claudia Mitchell's chapter, "Digital media and the knowledge-producing practices of young people in the age of AIDS," she challenges us to take youth seriously as "knowledge producers," rather than passive consumers. She spotlights districts in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo in South Africa, detailing the ways in which adolescent girls use participatory video to document critical issues and difficult experiences related to youth and HIV&AIDS. Similar to McIntosh (this volume), she stresses that much of the work on youth and digital media, especially in relation to participatory video, is far too celebratory. Her sobering examples of youth commenting on their own lives and concerns traverse the themes of poverty, barriers to schooling and teacher responsibilities, gender based violence, and ethical considerations. These examples compel us to not only take seriously the solutions youth put forward, but also to act on the knowledge they produce and co-produce in policies intended to change the culture and statistics around HIV&AIDS in South Africa and beyond.

In Chap. 7, "Lessons Learned from a Global Learning Network Project," Maureen Kendrick, Margaret Early, and Walter Chemjor offer learnable lessons from a global learning network project connecting youth in two secondary schools, one in Kenya and one in Canada. Drawing on New Literacy Studies, new literacies research, and identity work, the authors examine both the affordances and challenges of introducing new digital tools for communication in an under-resourced after-school journalism club in rural Kenya; they then demonstrate how, in establishing a global learning network, they had to re-examine their assumptions about why youth might choose to connect with one another across global contexts. Their study highlights how identity, context, and student interests play powerful roles in shaping language and literacy learning, engagement, and collaboration, while also openly addressing how unanticipated outcomes shifted their understandings about youth literacy practices.

Chapter 8, "eGranary and digital identities of Ugandan youth," intersects with Chap. 7 by highlighting both the problems and prospects of digital technology for enhancing learning and teaching. Bonny Norton takes us into the context of Uganda, documenting how eGranary, a digital portable library, has both strengths and limitations. Her innovative theoretical angle draws on a sociolinguistics of globalization (see Blommaert 2003, 2010), making a case for shifting from the long-held view that language primarily serves local functions tied to a community, time and place, to seeing language as existing in and for mobility across space and time. She demonstrates how the value of eGranary was best understood in terms of issues of uptake and how constructs of identity and investment contributed to this study of digital literacy in a poorly resourced community. Her argument necessitates a greater appreciation of students' imagined identities for enhancing their investments in digital literacies.

The ninth chapter, "What counts as the social in a social practices approach to the study of children's engagement with electronic media, language and literacy in a context of social diversity?" Mastin Prinsloo and Polo Lemphane further challenge assumptions about how the digital is taken up in under-resourced contexts. Their study, situated in South Africa, addresses in particular working class youths' early engagement with digital media. They review the role of "social practices" as both an analytical and explanatory resource in New Literacy Studies, examining the affordances of social practices theory for studying more closely how scales theory operates in sociolinguistics. In contrast to scales theory, the authors propose a compelling new research orientation that brings into much sharper view the broader picture of how electronic media work in diverse contexts, taking literacy researchers into new theoretical and analytic territories. They argue convincingly that we need to look "down" at detail in ethnographic research on engagements with electronic media, rather than "up." In other words, "complexity of the specific," at the grassroots level, has the potential to offer a more dynamic view of social complexity in social practices research.

In the tenth and final chapter in this section, "Shack Video Halls in Uganda as Youth Community/Literacy Learning and Cultural Interaction Sites," George Openjuru and Stella Achen take us inside the rarely documented practices of shack video halls to show how watching Vee-Jay (video-jockey) Luganda-interpreted English movies provides informal language learning opportunities for youth who have been forced to drop out of school. Their ethnographic study underscores the important and typically overlooked role of community members such as Vee-Jays as mediators and learning facilitators in local youth's informal language and literacy learning through mediated movies. They show how shack video halls have become important community learning sites with considerable potential for expansion to other community education initiatives for marginalized and excluded youth.

## Part III: Tensions and Discontinuities in New Literacies Practices

In Part III of this volume**,** *Tensions and discontinuities in new literacies practices,* the authors step back from analyses of the specificity of youth new literacy practices in situated contexts to examine some of the broader challenges for schools, educators and policy-makers who aspire to draw on and facilitate learning about and through new literacies.

Chapter 11, by Mclean, Rowsell and Lapp, focuses on both the possibilities and tensions of drawing on and validating new forms of youth literacies in school settings. In looking across American and Canadian contexts, they examine literacy policy documents as well as providing classroom scenarios in which broader and more situated notions of text are incorporated into English language arts classrooms. Their examples point to new challenges as youth's digital literacy practices push up against traditional school-based literacy practices. They argue that for new

policies to be credible and legitimate, teachers must be able to design lessons that draw on these abilities; that is, instructional and assessment practices need to reflect the abilities of youth as multimodal producers of knowledge. However, while new policies support broadened conceptions of literacy, school-based practice does not always respond to new directions. Youth and their teachers work from a constrained starting point where digital literacies are an additive feature to traditional conceptions of print-based literacy. Despite policy shifts, school literacies are socioculturally embedded activities and, as such, remain difficult to change.

Sefton-Green, in the 12th and final chapter, offers a more cautious analysis by critically reviewing two key strands of theory and research related to digital technologies, literacies and learning—one that focuses on the notion of a "different kind of learning self" created via the advent of digital technologies, and one that focuses on the culture of childhood—both the participatory possibilities of digital communities and anxieties about the commodification of youth. He then argues that within these strands there are persistent but false binaries created between learning among youth in informal settings and in school settings. At the same time, there is a confluence of the rhetoric of new forms of learning and the creation of a new creative class (as opposed to a more ideal notion of the democratization of learning that many scholars posit), and a concomitant recuperation of informal learning by schools rather than, so far, any real transformation.

## Closing Thoughts

In this volume we offer a focus on new literacies as they are taken up by youth and interwoven through diverse global contexts and perspectives. We provide a glimpse into the myriad ways youth use literacies, media, digital technologies, and various old and new resources to play, make meaning, take on new perspectives, address the intersections of local issues and global pressures, engage with popular culture, and encounter and resist cultural discourses and values. The many rich perspectives of youth literacies in this volume illustrate the rapidly and constantly changing forms and practices of youth literacies as youth interpret and produce a wide range of communicative texts, positioning and re-positioning themselves through print, arts, performance, and film in multi-faceted ways as they engage socially and civically in the world.

The authors here confirm the creativity and productivity of these practices, while recognizing the many contradictions and complexities in researching with youth across institutional and geographical sites: issues of marginalization, poverty and violence, challenges of civic engagement in the context of neoliberal political discourses and contexts, the potential dangers of participatory media, and the tensions between institutionalized literacy practices and the everyday practices of youth in diverse contexts.

We hope this volume will stimulate discussions about how educational practices might fully embrace youth as knowledge producers as well as consumers,

and as civically engaged members of a participatory culture. What assumptions about youth and literacy practices do we need to re-examine? What creative alternative practices might we, as educators, employ using new pedagogical designs that accommodate the complex texts that are consumed, produced and shared by and among contemporary youth? How might language and literacy policies be constructed, interpreted, and negotiated so as not to limit the potential of incorporating new literacy practices in schools? And finally, how might we work together toward real change in the structures, policies and practices of schooling, not for the sake of improving educational methods and standards, but to reach toward a more democratic and democratizing learning spaces for our youth?

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# Chapter 2
# Narrative Interpretation: Tacit and Explicit, Analogue and Digital

**Margaret Mackey**

"The twenty-first century … belongs to the tacit," say Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown (2011, p. 76). They point out that people learn many elements of how to manage their digital tools by simply starting, "doing it, learning by absorption and making tacit connections" (2011, p. 76). Explicit instruction is less useful for many digital challenges than simply playing around in the company of more expert friends and colleagues.

I agree with this assertion and find it helpful. I am less inclined to agree completely with their counter-assertion that the twentieth century was more profoundly linked to forms of overt and articulated learning. Certainly schooling was explicit (even rote) for much of the twentieth century, and Thomas and Brown's reference to the role of the encyclopedia is well argued (2011, p. 76). But even in the twentieth century, even when texts were all analogue, a great deal of learning was tacit; such implicit work simply attracted less attention than it does today.

In an era where young people learn about computers and mobile media almost by osmosis, the issue of the tacit is of considerable significance to educators, and we need to be alert to its silent and invisible importance in many forms of interpretive activity. The examples I propose to investigate in this chapter raise the question of how contemporary young people learn to comprehend narrative forms and strategies. Much of what they absorb about the shape and role of story can be "delivered" to them in explicit classroom presentation, but a great deal more (and I would argue a great deal of the more important) knowledge must be acquired tacitly, implicitly, through exposure to story and through the experience of bringing a story to life in the mind.

One tacit challenge facing interpreters is to understand the need to align with the implied reader. As Peter Rabinowitz points out, authors must design their creations to speak to an imagined audience:

M. Mackey (✉)
University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada
e-mail: mmackey@ualberta.ca

> An author has, in most cases, no firm knowledge of the actual readers who will pick up his or her book. Yet he or she cannot begin to fill up a blank page without making assumptions about the readers' beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions. As a result, authors are forced to guess; they design their books rhetorically for some more or less specific *hypothetical* audience…. Artistic choices are based upon these assumptions—conscious or unconscious—about readers, and to a certain extent, artistic success depends on their shrewdness, on the degree to which actual and authorial audience overlap. (1987, p. 21)

In other words, authors (and other creators) make rhetorical choices based on an (often tacit) assessment of their readers' likely repertoires, both explicit and implicit. Interpreters, in turn, must develop ways of aligning themselves with the assumptions of the text, and learning how to process this necessary orientation is an important but often invisible element in becoming a successful reader—or a successful user of digital materials.

In this chapter, I will explore the interfaces between explicit and tacit as they develop in different settings in which articulating the implicit is a natural and unforced outcome of a particular situation that entails forms of narrative understanding. My initial example involves Marilyn Cochran-Smith's study of young children hearing books read aloud in a nursery class. I will follow up this introductory illustration with a more extensive discussion of a study of my own, involving collective work with a novel, a film, and a video game. My examples cross over between analogue and digital in ways that offer a constructive reminder that the tacit is not new.

## Learning to Think in Narrative Ways

Understanding a story involves the kind of active rumination that allows an interpreter to vivify the events and characters in the mind. Bringing the story to active life in the mind can involve visualization, or the activation of voices and other sounds, and/or a sense of movement and inter-relationships among characters. There is no one right way to activate a narrative in the mind, but the step is important for comprehension and for enjoyment (not necessarily in that order).

This subtle and distinctive mental activity can be facilitated by the company of more competent others; young children often gain understanding of how story works by having stories read aloud to them by adults who already know how to make sense of a narrative. This social form of reading embodies forms of both explicit and tacit attention, and is helpfully observable in ways that more private and interior mental activities of reading are not. An investigation of story-reading events can offer insight into an oblique connection between, on the one hand, visible and audible experiences of the read-aloud story and its associated pictures and, on the other hand, the interior world of readers. In so doing, a study of this kind can shed light on some of the behaviours involved in narrative interpretation that we nearly always take for granted.

Marilyn Cochran-Smith recorded many early-years story times in a pre-school nursery classroom, and her observations about the kinds of learning taking place

in that setting—published in 1984, long before the digital began to take hold in popular culture—make instructive reading. I will quote her findings at some length because they offer an unusually explicit account of an activity that is often entirely tacit.

> Making sense of the uncomplicated narratives in many children's picture books is easy to take for granted, to consider a given. What is actually a given, however, is the assumption that readers of picture books will have learned to take information from their pools of knowledge in particular ways in order to make sense of texts. In other words, readers/listeners will take the knowledge that they have gained from direct or secondary experiences outside of texts and use this knowledge to make sense within texts (1984, p. 174).

How do children learn to make this transfer? Cochran-Smith describes the processes involved in group storyreading as "part of an initiation process…. a kind of apprenticeship … offering the children mediated literary experiences wherein an adult storyreader monitor[s] and guide[s] literary sense-making". (1984, p. 175)

The adult storyreader, in this scenario, bridges the gap between the abstract implied reader inscribed in the text and the real learning listeners sitting in the story circle.

> To help them make sense of texts, the storyreader guided the listeners to take on the characteristics of the readers implied in particular books. To shape real reader/listeners into implied readers, or whenever a mismatch between the two seemed to occur, she overrode the textual narrator and became the narrator herself, annotating the text and trying to establish some sort of agreement between real and implied readers. The storyreader mediated by alternating between two roles—spokesperson for the text and secondary narrator or commentator on the text.
>
> In order to mediate, the storyreader had to continuously assess and interpret both the text—its lexical and syntactic structures, the storyline, temporal and spatial sequences, the amount and kind of information carried by the pictures and by words, and the interrelationships of these two kinds of information—*and* the sense that the listeners were making of it all. (1984, p. 177, emphasis in original)

The storyreader, in other words, models ways of interacting with a book by drawing on relevant, appropriate, and useful life experience to help the listeners comprehend the narrative elements of the story. Children are not born with this understanding, though they are quick to develop it when exposed to a variety of story materials. In the nursery school setting, this kind of learning is articulated when the storyreader acts as an intermediary between what the story assumes and what the young listeners know. In order to accomplish the connection successfully, she must explain many points that are normally simply absorbed—the explicit enactment of a normally tacit process.

## Articulating the Tacit in Multiple Narrative Formats

I have long valued Cochran-Smith's work with these very young children, and greatly admired the skill with which she exposes and explores mental activities that normally remain unspoken. Ironically, however, my awareness and appreciation

of this work itself subsided into the tacit zone of the partially forgotten; I was not explicitly aware of its power as I designed a study aimed at enhancing our aware-ness of how implicit and articulated knowledge work together to create narrative understanding. It was only after my study ended that I became aware of the potential for overlap.

Like Cochran-Smith, I wanted to find or create a setting in which it would be natural for some normally implicit thinking to surface and be made available to oth-ers. I was, however, interested in the other end of the spectrum of narrative skills and worldliness. Instead of working with young children, I recruited participants whose capacity to interpret narrative was well developed and thoroughly internal-ized, although more so in some formats than in others. I was also interested in exploring at least some aspects of contemporary crossovers between analogue and digital storytelling, to see if sophisticated interpreters could help me shed light on some contemporary cultural changes and challenges.

In setting up my project, I had a number of conditions in mind. I wanted par-ticipants in my study to encounter complete narratives (just as Cochran-Smith in-vestigated complete readings in the nursery school, but without the advantages of brevity that attended her text set). I wanted a social setting that would seem, if not natural, then at least comparable to naturally occurring social settings. I wondered if a contrast might emerge between the narrative formats of novel and film, which I expected that my participants would have thoroughly internalized, and the newer vehicle of video game. I also wanted as much recordable information as possible so that I could investigate the transcripts in slow motion—yet I knew that much of the activity below the visible surface could only be reported, not recorded as it happened.

In the end, I achieved most of my goals with a study that is relatively simple to describe (though complex and lengthy to carry out).

## The Study

I worked with university undergraduates, most of whom were aged about 20 years of age. Because I recruited them through an advertisement in the student newspaper rather than via a single campus course, my participants came from a broad variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Twelve students participated in my study, nine men and three women. They arrived with varying levels of skill and comfort with the three formats on offer: film, novel, and video game. Most of the variation involved levels and comfort and skill in gaming, as I had anticipated, but one man was a bit uneasy about reading a whole novel. He was an expert gamer but described himself as "not really a reader." Nobody was concerned about the challenge of making sense of a complete film, though *Run Lola Run* turned out to be not what they expected.

To create a social arrangement that would mimic relatively familiar settings, I organized my participants into groups of three. My advertisement had specified that groups of friends were welcome to apply, and one set of three represented a friend-

ship group: these young men (Group C below) had been gaming together since junior high. Another pair of friends also participated, and for these five students, some forms of social connection based around texts were already established.

I asked the four groups of three to take part in three activities: film viewing, novel reading, and game playing. These activities were distributed over a variable number of sessions, but at the beginning all our meetings bore a strong family resemblance.

- In the first 2-h session, we watched a complete movie. I stopped it at intervals and canvassed their opinions about what was going on and how they knew.
- In the second session, we spent the first hour on a book. I asked them to read a few specified pages at a time, and then we talked about that small segment. I gave them sticky notes to attach to the side of the page when anything struck their attention and they used this mnemonic device as a prompt to their conversation. This exercise was repeated in five intervals all the way up to page 58; then I asked them to take the book and the sticky notes home and keep reading to the end, in circumstances more closely approximating normality. When they returned the following week, we talked about the complete novel, and then I collected their novels with the stickies still attached. I labelled each book with the reader's name, and the sticky notes serve as a kind of very rough and ready set of "footprints" of their progress through the book.
- In the second half of the second session, I set up a PlayStation video game for them to play together. They took turns managing the controller and I told those who were observing that they should feel free to advise the player as extensively as seemed useful.
- In the third session, we began with the discussion of the complete book, which everyone had now read through to the end. We moved on from that conversation to more general discussion about differences between watching, reading, and playing. They then returned to the game for however much time was left in the 2-h session.
- We carried on with game-playing for as many sessions as it took for each team to complete the game. The Christmas holiday disrupted our scheduling as class timetables changed, and one student left university altogether. Consequently two teams were merged into one, and that team continued to game. Thus 12 participants completed the film and novel segments and began the game, but only 9 finished the game.

The sessions were normally recorded with two video cameras (one on the participants, one on the text). Sessions were also audio-recorded and transcribed. The video records and the transcripts were loaded onto the software program Transana, which allows for analysis of such materials; and some preliminary coding was done. Transana also permits the researcher to hear the recorded conversation and view both the game screen and the transcript of relevant dialogue all at the same time, a very useful capacity.

So far I have discussed this project in abstract terms but of course it involved real people with all their differing idiosyncrasies, and it explored specific, singular

texts. Choosing the movie, book, and game was a challenge as I particularly wanted them to be new to the participants—I was in pursuit of initial reactions to unknown narratives. In the end, I chose a relatively old book, a film from Europe, and a brand new game, and no participant recognized any of them. The materials accidentally manifested the further advantage that each featured surface elements from a different medium, thus rendering some differences among media explicitly available for discussion.

My film was *Run Lola Run* (Tykwer 1998). This German film includes many game elements, including a plot feature of a "restart" that allows the characters to experience the same 20-min of their lives on a total of three different occasions with changed outcomes each time. My novel was Walter Dean Myers' *Monster* (1999), the first ever winner of the Printz Award for a young adult novel. This book is recounted in three formats: journal entries by the main character, a screenplay of his experiences also written by the hero, and some photographs and a few graphics. The game was *Shadow of the Colossus* (Uedo 2005), which was released just before the project began and was necessarily the final choice I made; this game has been described as having literary and even poetic qualities because of the long spaces of time made available for the hero (and those playing him) to reflect on the morality of his actions. For my purposes, it was helpful that a major criticism of this game on its release was that, though compelling, it was relatively short; even so, my participants took many hours to complete it.

These texts, each featuring a kind of formal hybridity, opened the door to some kinds of explicit observation that might have remained tacit with different materials. Furthermore, the social nature of the small groups meant that all participants had opportunities to take up the role that Cochran-Smith ascribes to the storyreader, that is, they were able to act as intermediary between the implied reader (or viewer or player) and the real people in the group who were "co-experiencing" the story. The combination of these particular people meeting these specific textual materials in this social setting meant that a great deal of normally unspoken understanding was articulated in the course of the study and made available for subsequent analysis. Paradoxically, this combination of *particular* elements made it possible to reach some *general* conclusions about the processes of narrative interpretation.

I went looking for crossover interpretive capacities that would function in all three media, so it is perhaps not surprising that I found them. Nevertheless, I was startled at the ease with which I identified similar approaches at work with each of the three different formats.

## Three Stories

A much fuller account of this complex project is available in book form (Mackey 2011). In this chapter, I will present an overview of the findings and consider their implications in terms of the explicit and the tacit, the analogue and the digital, the old and the new.

In concrete detail of content and presentation, the three texts varied hugely from each other. *Run Lola Run* offers three versions of Lola coming to the rescue of her boyfriend Manni, who has carelessly left a bag of money on a train. Manni is a courier for a criminal gang; he fears for his life if his boss Ronnie discovers his mistake. Lola must acquire 100,000 Deutschmarks and convey them to Manni in the 20 min before he is due to meet Ronnie. The 81-min movie offers three variants on this challenge, with changes caused by tiny differences in the timing of insignificant events. In the first one, Lola is shot; in the second, Manni is shot; in the third they appear to be successful and walk away together.

*Monster* tells the story of Steve, in prison awaiting trial for being an accessory to murder when the book opens. Steve has acted as lookout for a gang of thieves in a drugstore robbery that goes wrong, resulting in the shooting of the shop's owner. It is possible that Steve is a relatively innocent victim of circumstances, but the text is never entirely clear about that crucial fact. Steve uses his journal and the screenplay he decides to write about his court case to protest his innocence, but doubt about the extent of his involvement remains right to the end of the book.

*Shadow of the Colossus* introduces us to a young man on a horse carrying the body of a young woman to a temple in a deserted landscape. He lays the girl's body on the altar and invokes Dormin to bring her back to life. Dormin, whom we know only as a spectral voice and (in the English-language version) a set of cryptic subtitles, sets him the challenge of destroying 16 colossi, giant beasts represented on the walls of the temple by 16 statues. Accompanied only by his horse and armed only with a sword and a bow and arrow, the hero must first locate and then slaughter each colossus. These creatures all look different and have different lethal talents but each is enormous and intimidating, and each presents a huge strategic and tactical challenge to the would-be killer. Locating each colossus is as important as the fighting; following the focused light-rays from his raised sword, the hero must trek across magnificent but deserted countryside for many miles before locating his prey. We do not learn Dormin's motivation for wanting these mighty creatures to be slain until the end of the game, but long before that point, most players become uneasy about the need to kill the magnificent beings that are doing no harm to anyone until the hero shows up. All the participants in this study sooner or later, directly or indirectly, articulated a sense of disquiet about the morality of their fictional task.

Although the stories are very unlike each other, they do share a deeply-etched element of unreliable narrative. If Steve's efforts to understand himself better and to establish what led him to the fatal moment in the drugstore can be analyzed in these terms (and I think it can), each account could also be described as a form of quest story.

All the participants quickly perceived that the stories they were being told were profoundly untrustworthy, and the need to address what was "truthful" in the fictions being presented also led to the articulation of modality registers that often operate tacitly. I would be untruthful myself if I claimed to have selected these texts with this virtue in mind; my selection criteria were far more external to the stories themselves and largely concerned my own quest to find materials that my participants would not recognize. Nevertheless, the uneasy fit of these stories to their own frames was an asset for this study.

## Crossing Platforms and Understanding Narrative

At the level of concrete observation and analysis, the readers obviously behaved very differently with each of these three texts. At a more abstract level, their behaviours were remarkably similar, no matter which group they belonged to or which story they approached. Six important components of narrative comprehension manifested themselves across the study and across all three media. With all three text samples, all four groups engaged in the following behaviours:

- *deciding how to pay initial attention*: making provisional observations and inferences about what might be important and should be watched for;
- *entering the fictional world*: making a cognitive and affective commitment to how possibilities might unfold in this particular story world;
- *orienting*: finding a way to move forward through the story;
- *filling the blanks left in this particular telling of the story*: making inferences, closing gaps, creating connections between different story elements;
- *making progress or making do*: moving through what I came to call the "unconsidered middle" of the story, where the interpreter can be most completely absorbed in the story world—or finding ways to compensate and keep going anyway when that absorption fails to occur;
- *concluding*: reaching judgments, both provisionally, throughout the story, and finally, when the end is reached—and afterwards (Mackey 2011, p. 14).

At the same time as the interpreters managed their understanding of the content of the stories in the ways delineated above, they also had to manage the technical processes by which they garnered enough information to start to make sense of the content. In *Monster*, they had to work out the relationship between the journal entries and the screenplay; they also needed to establish, within the context of the sprawling font of the journal entries, whether the differential sizes of letters and words indicated shifts of meaning. In *Run Lola Run*, they had to find ways to interpret the red-filtered images that mark the transition scenes between one iteration of Lola's journey and the next; they also had to make sense of sequences of still photos and some short clips of animation that interrupt the live action. *Shadow of the Colossus* called for even more basic skill development; players needed to master the PlayStation controller so that they could use it as an interface connecting to the content of the story. They were frustrated when the controls instead became a processing *barrier*, whose opacity prevented the essential step *into* the story world and left them, baffled and annoyed, on the surface level of trying to decide which buttons to push.

Because the participants worked in groups of three, such moments proved very illuminating in terms of shedding light on the dual nature of how we come to comprehend a story. Normally, once interpreters attain a level of processing automaticity, the basic decoding and the broader development of understanding operate in tandem in their minds, and coordination is smoothly, invisibly, and tacitly achieved without requiring conscious attention. In the circumstances of this study, especially in the game, with one person handling the controls and two freed to think about the

story, the importance of being able to coordinate both elements of narrative comprehension—technical decoding and content development—was rendered explicit.

An initial scene makes that dichotomy very clear. The hero receives instructions from Dormin to find the first colossus and slay it. He is told to raise his sword to the light, and the point where the rays cluster together shows him the direction he should follow. But even as the player sets out to explore the new universe before him, he or she must learn to master the controls for mounting the horse, raising the sword, guiding the horse in the direction specified by the focal point of the rays, and so forth. It sounds simple and intuitive, but if you are not so accustomed to using a PlayStation controller that every action is automatic, it can be frustrating and difficult. The following dialogue renders this difficulty explicit. Martin, Tess, and Sunama, the members of Group B, are playing; Martin is in charge of the controls and it would seem from these little extracts that the two women are, at least temporarily, in charge of story comprehension. The separation of the two components of comprehension is very explicit.

Martin:   Pushing this down… all right, horse.
Tess:       Where is the sunlight?
Martin:   Okay, this is hard … extremely difficult! Agro [the horse] is not hip.
Sumana:  How easy is it to, like, point it in certain directions?
Tess:       This horse is very stubborn … ooh.

(*Hero struggles with the horse and eventually re-enters the temple*)

Tess:       Do you remember how to do the sword-raising thing? You might want to do that then. He's running.

At this point in the conversation, Martin is at least talking about the horse. As his struggles with the controls intensified, the divergence between the terms of his contribution and that of his partners became even more substantial:

Tess:       I still say you go to the sun and do the sword thing. It seems like that was the last instruction he really gave, short of kill those gigantic idols on the wall.
Martin:   So you … left analog stick is movement. You press "X" to make him go and make him stop or actually, not to make him stop. You press "X" and you can go faster and then hard back on the left analog stick.

If Martin were working as a solitary interpreter, he would have to master the left analog stick and the X button before he could even start to think about going to the sun and doing the sword thing. In this team setting, Tess and Sunama pressed ahead with the interpretation of content, while Martin struggled with basic decoding; the two elements of narrative interpretation are laid out side by side.

Another way of describing the processing issues faced by Group B is to talk about the difference between "looking at" the codes that supply a narrative and "looking through" them to perceive the story being developed (Lanham 1995, p. 5). Clearly in this exchange, Martin is "looking at" the surface of the controls and Tess and Sunama have a free pass for the moment to "look through" to the story world.

Michael Polanyi's metaphor for the distinction between these two conditions is well known, and it comes very close to the scene described above:

> Anyone using a probe for the first time will feel its impact against his fingers and palm. But as we learn to use a probe, or to use a stick for feeling our way, our awareness of its impact on our hand is transformed into a sense of its point touching the objects we are exploring…. We are attending to the meaning of its impact on our hands in terms of its effect on the things to which we are applying it. (1983, pp. 12–13)

In Polanyi's terms, Martin feels the impact of the probe in his hands, and Tess and Sumana are interested in what is going on at the point of the stick.

In the normal cognitive processes of private textual interpretation, the merging of these two components is managed entirely tacitly. Once we become fluent interpreters, we notice it as an active interruption in the smooth flow of the story if we are troubled by a word we don't understand, or a cut from one scene to another doesn't make sense, or we are directed to find a cleft in the canyon wall and we can't interpret the pixels to decide what is wall and what is cleft. When these matters are being processed fluently, we are unaware that our mind is underpinning our sense of "which way the sword's rays are pointing" with specific instructions to our eyes and hands to "combine pressing X with movement of the left analogue stick." We just focus on the story's development and leave the traffic direction of decoding to our non-conscious mind, outside the range of our explicit attention. This management of varying repertoires is common to all forms of media interpretation but it flies beneath the radar and we do not often have to think about what we are actually *doing* in order to comprehend the story before us.

## Moving to Tacit

The children in Cochrane-Smith's study learned to incorporate life understanding into their vivification of a story told through words and still images, and then to internalize this process so completely that it became automatic and did not distract their attention away from composing the sense of the story.

The participants in my study mostly learned to handle the PlayStation controller in such a way that they were able to focus on the challenge of the story—how to kill a particular colossus—without often having to focus explicitly on the controls. A Transana-supported chart and graph from that study illustrates how Group C, the most competent set of gamers in the project, rendered their use of the controller almost entirely automatic, and how it became relatively invisible to them except when they chose to make jokes about it. Many of their jokes played with the contrast between story discourse and controller discourse, so they would introduce specific mention of the button R1 at inappropriate moments. The table below therefore tabulates working references to the buttons, jokes about the buttons (including R1 discourse), and those jokes explicitly directed towards the use of R1. The colossi are slain in numerical order, so this table represents a chronology of Group C's game. The change from explicit attention to the buttons during the battles with the first
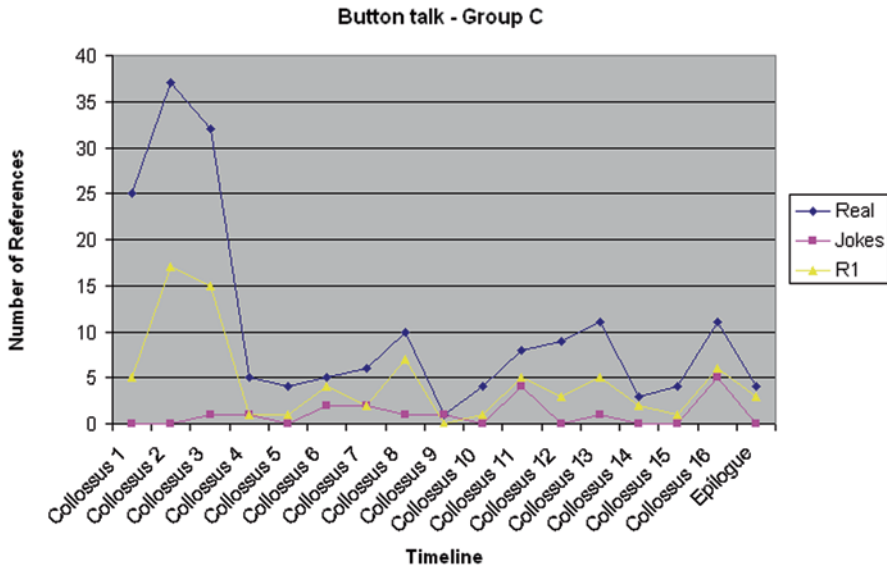
**Fig. 2.1** This graph presents some significant information about how readily the skilled players of Group C adapted to the specific commands of this game. The members of Group C were also adept at combining their jokes with references to button use (Mackey 2011, p. 143)

two colossi to the major drop-off by the time the team fights the third colossus is a visible trace of the group's move to automaticity.

It is notable that the need to mention buttons never goes away completely; in three fierce battles, explicit attention to the buttons rises again (not surprisingly, one of these is the final fight with the last colossus). It is also clear that not every mention of R1 is a joke (the R1 references run a consistent line placed between the total mentions of the buttons and the joke line along the bottom of the graph). Even when our attention is completely absorbed by the narrative we are processing, we remain able to surface the decoding apparatus when something interrupts our "looking through." Group C, as sophisticated gamers, made a kind of epiphenomenal game out of shifting between forms of attention with their jokes about buttons, but they also knew that managing the controls was crucial to their enjoyment (Table 2.1; Fig. 2.1).

It could be argued that, almost by definition, what we achieve tacitly as we comprehend a text is not readily available for analysis. If we actively notice something, it is already marked. A parallel experience is the way we can drive for miles without consciously noticing the landscape. Once something attracts our attention back to what we are doing and where we are, however, the implicit skillset that has allowed us to monitor the environment in tacit ways shifts to something more aware and explicit.

The social framework for playing and interpreting games allows more of a window on this process than is available for other forms of text comprehension. It is noteworthy in this project (perhaps you tacitly observed it!) that participants had to

**Table 2.1** 'Button talk' in Group C's game of *Shadow of the Colossus*

| | Real button references | Joke button references | R1 references |
|---|---|---|---|
| Colossus 1 | 25 | 0 | 5 |
| Colossus 2 | 37 | 0 | 17 |
| Colossus 3 | 32 | 1 | 15 |
| Colossus 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Colossus 5 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Colossus 6 | 5 | 2 | 4 |
| Colossus 7 | 6 | 2 | 2 |
| Colossus 8 | 10 | 1 | 7 |
| Colossus 9 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Colossus 10 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Colossus 11 | 8 | 4 | 5 |
| Colossus 12 | 9 | 0 | 3 |
| Colossus 13 | 11 | 1 | 5 |
| Colossus 14 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| Colossus 15 | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Colossus 16 | 11 | 5 | 6 |
| Epilogue | 4 | 0 | 3 |
| Total | 179 | 18 | 78 |

*stop* viewing the film, *stop* reading the book, in order to speak about their experiences with these texts. It was possible, however, for them to talk about gaming *while they gamed*. Indeed Group C, longtime gaming friends, made it very clear that chatting about their gameplay—advising, teasing, joking even as they moved the action forward—was their normal behaviour and one of the major pleasures of playing the game.

The graphic trace of Group C's achievement of fluency in their gameplay somewhere between the second and third colossi reflects their conscious attention as manifested in their discussion—in other words, they had to say something about the buttons for it to show up in this graph. Obviously they did not cease to monitor their button use throughout the game, but that activity retreated from the zone of their conscious focal attention for most of the time, and when they did mention buttons later in the game it was much more likely to be in purposeful rather than exploratory ways.

## Conclusions

In the nursery story reading sessions, the adult reader modelled ways of making the narrative live in the listeners' minds, connecting life experience to the events portrayed in the words and pictures. In the group sessions of game-playing in my project, players distributed the cognitive work, with the controller-holder managing the interface work while the other two group members sustained the build-up of narrative comprehension. The points of comparison between these literacy activities, old

and new, analogue and digital, are striking in their similarity, and involve activities that recede to a point of tacit awareness as automaticity in processing is achieved.

The similarities are important to note as we strive to come to terms with a world of new literacies. I think many non-gaming professionals harbour a tacit assumption that games represent a completely alien form of text life. Baffled by the complexities of learning to internalize the intricacies of controller use, they write off the elements of narrative understanding that are also involved, and do not consider games as a form of storytelling.

I do not want to overplay the similarities among these text forms and under-rate the importance of the ways in which players can directly affect story outcomes through their actions, a form of interactive interpretation that is not available in most novels and films. Nevertheless, I think we lose more than we gain when we ring-fence game narratives as something completely different from all other forms of contemporary storytelling. Both gamers and non-gamers can be guilty of this over-emphasis on difference, and it can interfere with tacit use of expert knowledge in making sense of stories.

Our definitions of "literature" have gradually broadened to include the idea of film; a catholic classification that makes room for digital forms of storytelling is now overdue. My example involves video games, but other forms are also in development, and young people are developing many forms of tacit and explicit expertise. Their classrooms and libraries need to make better acknowledgement of the importance of the tacit, the role of digital dynamics, and the significance of overlapping and cross-supporting forms of interpretive competence.

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# Chapter 3
# Videogame Literacies: Purposeful Civic Engagement for 21st Century Youth Learning

**Kathy Sanford and Sarah Bonsor Kurki**

## Twenty-First Century Youth Civic Engagement

Using videogames as a tool for enhancing youth civic engagement, on first glance, seems to be contradictory and inconsistent with what we know about videogames and learning, yet current research is indicating many subtle ways in which videogames can heighten adolescents' interest and abilities in the adult world they are joining. Increasingly, youth are demonstrating their desire to address issues of both personal and public concern, drawing on their interactions and thinking in immersive videogame environments. 'Civic' engagement for today's youth has taken on different form and appearance and, as with videogames, needs closer attention by researchers and educators to more deeply understand new iterations of youth thinking and action. Rather than committing to community and society through traditional forms, i.e., volunteerism, organizational involvement, electoral participation, they are enacting their sense of personal responsibility in different ways, using technological tools and social media to connect and impact community decision-making, i.e., online petitions, newsfeeds, and social media sites. These forms of engagement have links to their gaming and gaming communities as they engage immersively in worlds where they regularly solve complex problems, take on leadership roles, and make moral and ethical decisions.

Educators and parents have recognized that videogames are increasingly part of the lives of today's youth (McGonigal 2010), yet have been regularly dismissed and disparaged by adults through media and schooling. However, given the considerable time and resources expended by youth engaged in videogames, it is vital that educators become more knowledgeable about the issues and potential related to digital games and corresponding social networking and recognize the significant effect of videogames upon youths' learning and thinking (Jenkins 2010; Kahne et al.

K. Sanford (✉) · S. Bonsor Kurki
University of Victoria, Victoria, BC, Canada
e-mail: ksanford@uvic.ca

S. Bonsor Kurki
e-mail: sbk@uvic.ca

2009; Spence and Feng 2010). Although educators are aware of the *negative* aspects of videogames, they have limited insights into the benefits derived from working/ playing with videogames. For example, though it has become evident that many youth engage in sophisticated and democratic ways in online petitions and partici-patory blog sites associated with videogames, society at large does not recognize the skills learned in videogame communities as potential sites of literacy for civic engagement. It is now understood by some scholars that educators need to explore the capacity of these twenty-first century 'digital' learners to address the civic chal-lenges facing our information-processing post-industrial society. As considerable time and resources are expended by youth in developing and playing videogames, it is vital that educators continue to investigate their potential to develop meaningful lifelong twenty-first century literacies.

This chapter describes a five-year longitudinal study exploring *how engagement with videogames influences youths' literacies and attitudes with respect to their potential for engagement as future citizens*. Over this period of time our research team developed meaningful relationships with 11 adolescents who participated in monthly gaming sessions, interviews and focus groups. This qualitative research explored questions of literacy with/in video game play, and became a participant-driven process whereby adolescents informed us about their sophisticated involve-ment in new literacies, particularly through gaming. The youth became key mem-bers of the research team, describing their long-term engagement with videogames that follows their transition to adulthood and their interests in becoming civically engaged in their community. Using a participatory action research design, the par-ticipants in this study and the researchers shared the potentially positive impacts of videogame play on the ways that youth develop twenty-first century literacy skills useful to them as adults. Such a partnership necessitates changed thinking about relationships between adult authority and the youth voice. The study has developed for us a richer understanding of ways to bridge between youth and adult literacies, using digital media/games in ways that enable fuller engagement in today's com-plex and challenging global society.

Because of the extended research period the number of participants involved varied depending on their ability to attend focus groups or meet for interviews. This led to some participants being represented in the data more often than others. When considering the themes in this chapter, four participants' have been included: Sam, Mia, Malik and Nelo. When they first joined the study these participants were high school students who played mostly massive, multiplayer, online (MMOs) games, like *Halo* and *World of Warcraft*. They were all also heavily involved in the par-ticipant created website related to the research. Malik and Nelo were nearly always present at the meetings and introduced some new participants to the group. As Sam grew more interested in role-playing games like *Dungeons and Dragons* he spent less time playing video games, and this lead to his waning attendance. Mia was a semi-professional gamer, having gained interest from sponsors who wanted her to play at tournaments in the United States. When they graduated, Sam and Mia at-tended meetings less and less, while Malik and Nelo stayed on and became more heavily involved in other aspects of the research, like co-presenting at conferences and speaking at workshops for parents and students.

Several points are worth noting in exploring how engagement with videogames enhances youths' literacies with respect to their potential for democratic and civic engagement as future citizens. First, youth articulate their awareness of their developing literacy skills; at the same time, they are concerned about the future uses of the skills they develop and are anxious to be involved in meaningful ways in democratic society (Sanford and Merkel 2010). Second, complex learning processes hold great potential for building civic engagement as we create interconnected literacy communities in the twenty-first century. Civic responsibility develops from productive engagement in a community; youths' literacy skills are important for communicating through online media, sharing ideas, debating, and engaging critically with ever-growing amounts and types of texts. It is therefore advantageous for educators to recognize the literacies possessed by today's youth, to understand how they learn, and how their learning is applicable and transferable to their lives as citizens and future leaders in society.

## Literacy for Meaningful Engagement in the World

In a society of burgeoning information and technological advances, notions of literacy that focus on the reading and writing of print-based texts need to be continually examined in order to provide educational experiences that enable ongoing learning and engagement in today's world. Alloway and Gilbert (1997), for example, have reminded us that "what it means to be 'literate' is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated as we become increasingly affected by technological and informational change" (p. 51). Youth continually participate in popular media, developing a wide range of skills in understanding and creating texts using alphabetic, visual, and oral semiotic systems in diverse ways. Thus they develop skills and confidence in navigating digital spaces and new technological tools. Kress (2003) suggests "it is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from a vast array of social, technological and economic factors" (p. 1). Gee (2003) reports that youth are resisting school literacies where they have repeatedly been unsuccessful, "and instead [are] becoming literate in the semiotic domain of gaming which opens up experiences in different ways of speaking, listening, viewing, and representing" (p. 18). Through videogames youth learn to read multiple symbol systems, including maps, charts, numbers, and patterns. They learn how to communicate through online texting, reading, speaking through headsets, and listening to help their game play. These cues and modern technological skills are becoming more necessary for lifelong learning and engagement with diverse wide-ranging communities.

Greenhow et al. (2009) suggest that the use of Web 2.0 literacies by youth influences their learning processes, with videogaming playing a critical role in their digital literacy engagement. The broader terrain of digital culture reframes how youth engage in formal and informal learning opportunities as they learn to participate in a society with greater access to information and social networks (Barron 2006). This access provides multiple viewpoints on events, "allowing players to draw on distributed knowledge and develop skills in leadership and collective action that

can be used to tackle real-world political problems or afford opportunities to explore ethical choices and develop empathetic understanding" (Raphael et al. 2010, p. 200). The study described here has focused on the ways that engagement with videogames affords the development of literacy skills and attitudes that enable youth to become productive members of society. It has informed our understanding of how youth are using their diverse literacy skills to make the transition to adult community membership, how videogame play has shaped that experience, and how community membership/civic engagement is manifested for twenty-first century youth. Ways that youth use their twenty-first century literacy skills to learn about societal issues such as power, collaboration, morality, responsibility, community involvement, and respect are also important to their civic engagement (Hall and Jefferson 2006). The growing importance of peer networks and online communities among youth implicitly emphasize generational changes in social identity (Bennett 2008).

## Complexity of Videogame Literacies

Complexity theory (Morrison 2006) has provided us with a powerful description of ways in which youth learn twenty-first century literacies that are meaningful to their lives and learning. Complexity theory provides a framework that enables us to understand literacy learning as a complex and emergent process, in a connected relationship developed both individually and collectively among youth in community.

Traditional approaches to literacy teaching have fragmented language to manage learning, which has resulted in skills and knowledge being practiced and taught outside of the context of their application. However, in videogames knowledge and skills are linked, providing a more holistic and relevant way of learning. Videogame players, particularly in immersive game situations, become of a complex system of 'gamers' who are engaged in gameplay where engagement derives its meaning within an environment that is interactive, dynamic, and flowing, where there are infinite possibilities and real-world purposes for learning to communicate, read multiple texts, and respond using written and oral symbol systems. The inherent instability of a complex system, where responses are in the moment and meaningful in the game engagement, creates a dynamic environment that stimulates and engages the learner. The stability that has previously characterized literacy learning is what has stifled learners' interest, created boredom and discourages the playfulness that should be inherent in literacy learning. Videogames create spaces where learning is dynamic and ongoing, and literacy skills are being developed as they are required to accomplish a meaningful task, rather than to complete fragmented skills and knowledge. Seeing literacy learning as holistic and connected creates systems thinking in youth, thinking about relationships and connections. Bringing complexity thinking to literacy learning requires that we attend to the following features of complex systems:

1. Diversity of literacy skills and aptitudes among youth learners
2. Emergent understandings of the functions and intentions of literacies
3. 'Liberating constraints' or guidelines and limitations that frame literacy learning, providing common rules and vocabulary
4. Redundancy or degree of commonality needed for communication and shared understandings between youth as they interact and share learning
5. Distributed nature of learning, utilizing the brain and the body simultaneously in a wider context/community, where the learner takes an active part in interpreting/reading, utilizing/applying, and generating/producing information and strategies for successful engagement with the game.

## Affordances of Video Games with Youth: Ethics, Backstories, and Learning for Life

In our research, we explored, with the youth participants, questions regarding the kind of literacies required for and developed through videogame play; the project has evolved into a participant-driven process where the adolescents informed the researchers about their deep involvement in new literacies, in particular videogames, and in the evolution of their learning as they entered adulthood. The participatory nature of this action research methodology used 'collaborative conversations' (Hollingsworth 1992) to generate accounts of literacy learning in light of the participants' forming experiences as adults. Data includes transcriptions of focus meetings and collaborative conversations; transcriptions of individual interviews; contents of blog and forum entries made by participants and researchers; and a website developed collaboratively with the participants (See Fig. 3.1).

Our findings from this study have suggested significant literacy learning for youth through their (often extensive) engagement with videogames. Immediately recognizable affordances of videogame texts include facility with multimodal texts, accessing information from diverse symbol systems (graphics, charts, images, maps) in addition to the many alphabetic text messages represented onscreen. However, the depth of literacy engagement extends far beyond 'reading' and 'decoding'. Deep engagement with a narrative and the subsequent critical understanding of narrative is a result of videogame play for these participants. They examined the integrity of the storyline and the characters within that story, ensuring that they were believable in the context of the narrative, for instance *Call of Duty* and *Final Fantasy*. They also explored the backstory, looking for consistency between the ongoing story and previous story elements. Backstory was a feature of the videogame narrative that deeply engaged the participants over long periods of time, and the videogame format enabled questions related to character/author motivation in the text to be deeply interrogated. Through related blogs, forums, and websites, the participants researched elements of the story. They also participated in writing responses, informational blog posts, and

**Fig. 3.1** A gaming session/focus group

creation of their own website. All of these non-traditional literacy engagements encouraged one participant, Malik, to begin reading books, something he had never enjoyed in his years at school. He became an avid reader of books related to the videogames he was playing, seeking information about World War II as well as wanting read about the production of the game and its designers. The intertextuality of texts did not escape the participants' notice; they recognized that the meaning they were deriving from one text was shaped by other related texts; they wove together ideas from different sources to create a more complete and multifaceted whole, comparing one source with another. The actions and responses taken by participants demonstrate the complexity of video games; obtaining diverse skills, having embodied experiences, discovering emergent literacies, and adopting an active role as learner during the gaming experience. These skills enable a thoughtful exploration of ways in which they could gain access to and participate in shaping and responding to information and ideas.

The literacies developed through these participants' engagement with videogames went beyond text analysis, however. They learned how to work collaboratively and ethically together in game situations, and were able to consider various alternatives to living in the game. They explored life and death choices and further, considered how they wanted to live with their team-mates and opponents—choices that not only influenced the game result but also the ways they felt about themselves and the others in society. The uses of these literacies to live full lives in the real world are, we think, of significance to how we want to understand the importance of 'literacy' for youth in formal and informal learning situations, beyond traditional conceptions of reading and writing.

Three themes will be explored further in this chapter, building on the notion that youth literacies are of significance in all aspects of their lives, as they make important decisions, learn to navigate challenging educational and career situa-

tions, and understand elements of traditional literacies that apply to new literacy and learning situations.

## Literacy for Ethical Decision-Making

Literacy learning is not, or should not be, for its own sake. We learn oral, and then written, language to live meaningful lives. Children learn to listen and to talk so they can communicate in the world of their family and community. They learn to negotiate, reason, empathize, and argue—all for the sake of making sense of and influencing their worlds. Literacy enables articulation of complex ideas, examination of these ideas, and sharing with others. Traditionally these literacy encounters have taken place in face-to-face conversations and in written form; today there are many alternative ways to hone literacy skills—social media tools such as podcasts, twitter, email, Facebook, blogs, YouTube, and websites have created a wide range of additional spaces that utilize multiliteracies. No longer are people just speaking or writing or illustrating—they are using all semiotic forms to convey their ideas to others, in many diverse formats, often concurrently. They are 'prosuming' (Tapscott and Williams 2006); that is, simultaneously producing and consuming texts, texts being created by the same people who will ultimately use them.

In videogame play and videogame design, players engage in complex problems for which there are no single or simple response. They have to decide whether, as in *Infamous*, to share their food supplies with people trying to survive or to take it all for themself and their friends because they don't know when the next food supply will be delivered. In *Red Dead Redemption*, players have to decide whether to save a person from mob justice by putting their life on the line or just act as passive bystander as the mob drags a man behind their horses. *Mass Effect 2* constantly raises moral issues by way of 'paragon' or 'renegade' choices to be made, i.e., decide to sacrifice thousands of human lives to attempt to gain an edge on an unknown enemy threatening to make organic life extinct, or try to fight the enemy with what they have while saving the lives of many. Moral choices within these games are exaggerated, making the impact of each choice a key connection between the player's decision and how the game unfolds. This serves to make moral/ethical choices explicit within the gameplay, and to highlight the importance of discussing these choices with others, so as to encourage players to think more about how the decision might change the outcome of the game or how players act within the game. The articulation of problems and choices provides players with ways to make their thinking explicit—to themselves and to others. They use language, both in oral and written forms depending on the game, to make considered choices, to add interest to the game, and to try out alternative ways of acting. These choices need to be made rapidly; they have only a short time to assess situations, read the 'lay of the land', and decide on the best response. The complex multimodal screens they read include symbols, words, colours, positions, and verbal comments all at the same time. Learning to read and respond to the changing conditions are complex inter-

**Fig. 3.2** Participant and researcher curated website

related skills that videogame players must learn in order to progress in the game. But challenging as it is to learn these complex skills, players take the time to learn the literacy skills required to survive and thrive in these videogame environments.

For youth with access, new social media affords many opportunities for them to develop their literacy skills, enabling them to communicate articulately and powerfully with the adult world they are entering. The blog site created by our research participants offered one such opportunity, a space where players could think about ethical and moral issues of import, share their ideas, and get responses back (See Fig. 3.2). In the following excerpt from the participants' website, Sam shows himself to have developed traditional print-based literacy skills that include awareness of audience, importance of voice, use of questions, variety of sentence types and lengths, appropriate vocabulary, and use of examples.

> When I am fighting and killing my enemies in a video game, its not because I want to think like "Oooh. I want to see what shade of red his blood is" or "Genocide is Fun! Lets Burn down this Village!" or anything like that. When I play these games, it's more to me like the removal of obstacles. The primary enjoyment I derive from first person shooters isn't really the realism of the guns or blood or combat (though they certainly make the game more immersive), but more like the efficiency at which I can defeat my opponents or achieve mission objectives or goals. While I may exclaim "YAY! Headshot!", my subconscious mind is more thinking "That was efficient" or " My skill or accuracy in general has

improved, I feel improved/better" instead of a desire to see things die. I think of it kind of like a game of Tetris. You have the screen full except for that one straight down column and you finally get that straight line piece, and knock out 4 lines instantly. It makes me feel good because I organized and performed to maximum possible efficiency in that given situation, not because I hate the pile of blocks and I want to see them die. It's an obstacle to pass and when I do pass it I feel empowered.

This outlook I have is most likely due to the fact I have a solid differentiation in my mind between what is real and what isn't. Being able to do that helps me look past what would otherwise disgust, disrupt or revolt others to get the job done. I might notice the artistic value of a particular sequence which would take tremendous effort from the developers in a game, but I don't attribute the exploded head of my foe as that of a real person. I have morals, I find that despite those morals application in real life, they don't apply in a scenario on a video game quite as much. I feel that the barrier between real and fake people justifies my indiscretion in games because I feel I am in control of my distinction between the two. I know those people in video games aren't real, and thus they cannot really die so why should I act like they do? I'm not going to question reality or think its fun to kill people because I know what it is to be human and how others are exactly like me. I think of the consequences that would have, the opportunities I would be instantaneously halting for that individual's life I had just ended, and the lives that would be affected and damaged because of that action I had made. Video games don't do that to me because there is no Cause and Effect chain to think about. It doesn't mean that I am desensitized by the actions I take and how I don't take them seriously. In real life, I hate conflict and confrontation almost any physical or emotional kind. One of my friends might even go as far as to say I'm a pacifist. I have never intentionally or unintentionally swung a fist at anyone.

## Story and Backstory

Researcher: What makes a good game?
Malik: The storyline is good … something interesting that keeps you involved but doesn't really repeat anything and has some surprises in it.

### *Immersion*

If the narrative of a video game is really catching, players become deeply immersed in their gaming experience. They are curious about how characters will develop and in which ways their choices will effect the direction of the game play. The more immersive the story is, the more likely a gamer will commit to playing the game to its end, even if this takes considerable time. The time commitment is rewarded through new details of the story being revealed which support further game advancement. It's like reading a good novel, but in videogames there are many different variations of how a story can develop and many different types of stories within one game, that maintain an interest for many hours, weeks and months. The possibilities of a game's stories provide motivation for the intensive and extended ongoing play in which gamers participate. Malik explains that as he played through the game and learned more about the stories, his understanding deepened and this seemingly enhanced his experience.

> When I first played World of Warcraft, I thought C'thun was a giant monster, I thought he
> was the boss, but later on I realized, through playing the game that he was an old god, he
> was one of the original gods who people would worship a long time ago. Then when I went
> through the war I learned that a long time ago there were these giant robot-like creatures
> that went across the universe and made sure that life could live and thrive. When they got
> to earth they found the old gods there who were kind of ruling and there was a huge war
> and the Titans ended up winning. There are always new things appearing in the game, Titan
> artifacts, things that have happened and things that have been left behind by the creators …
> all the old stuff like fire is tied to the old gods and you fight them and you just learn so much
> more and get such a deeper understanding of what's going on around you, if you understand
> the laws of the game.

Along with becoming immersed in a game, players also demonstrate real world emotions in response to in game stimuli. When watching someone play a game one is likely to see a full range of emotional reactions: joy, anger, frustration, exhilaration, and guilt. There can often be an adrenaline rush from the suspense about how a raid will turn out or what is waiting around that next corner, like in this comment from Nelo about playing Rapture.

> But like, there's the scariness, like this one, you walk past, you go down this narrow cor-
> ridor thing and then you go down some ladder and then you turn around and go down this
> ladder and this girl pops up and she's like, a ghost or something and she starts deteriorating
> into bugs. You go down the ladder and there is this dead guy or the guy you are trying to
> kill but he is like part dead and he deteriorates and you're like "Ok. That was a little scary."

A back-story, background story, or backstory (or in games, the background of a character) is the literary device of a narrative chronologically earlier than, and related to, a narrative of primary interest. Generally, it is the history of characters or other elements that underlie the situation existing at the main narrative's start. Backstories are usually revealed, partially or in full, chronologically or otherwise, as the main narrative unfolds. However, a story creator may also create portions of a backstory or even an entire backstory that is solely for their own use in writing the main story and is never revealed in the main story. This information may be shared through out-of-game texts like books or on webpages as Malik explains:

> Because of World of Warcraft I love the background story of the game, I actually bought
> one of the backstory books and I just love it, I love knowing what's going on in the story
> and what's happened before. I hated reading when I was young because I didn't find it
> entertaining and fun. I didn't have any books I liked, but as I grew up I found book series
> that I really loved, they're so interesting and they talk about all the background, I love that!

## Consistency

The dramatic revelation of secrets from the backstory, as a useful technique for developing a story, was recognized as far back as Aristotle, in Poetics. As a literary device backstory is often employed to lend depth or verisimilitude to the main story. Consistency of action, characters, setting and plot between game levels, expansions, versions, and episodes contribute to the integrity of the game. This is very important because if the details are not accurate and/or correct the gamers will know and

abandon it. In this excerpt, Malik and Nelo talk about the involvement that gamers have in keeping the developers accountable to the storylines they create.

> Nelo: The games are so widespread, they're all around the world, and people always have options for how to get answers. The developers are getting really good at responding to their community, but if you have a question and no one's able to answer it, someone might drop a comment on the blog and answer it for you.
> Malik: At BlizCom this year they had a panel of people who do the backstory. One of the members of the audience asked a question about a character, wondering whether he died because he had all of a sudden appeared in the latest expansion as a leader of one of the towns. So the developer on the panel had to go back and check that all the pieces lined up. So even if the creators miss a detail, people who spend time with the game will pick up mistakes and correct them.
> Nelo: This character eventually got added into the game.
> Nelo: I also think that kids' books are not backstory driven, and a lot of videogames have a backstory to them so that everything makes sense and there's no lack of continuity. You do get backstory in books but you have to read at an adult level—videogames are a good way of understanding the stories, they're geared to everyone.

The types of stories that videogames offer are not available in many other places. Perhaps this is due to the complexity within the videogame encounter stemming from the collaborative, multiliterate and emergent aspects of their stories. Although books, television and movies offer stories and visuals how one experiences these texts is far more linear and often a more independent experience, like imagining the visuals for books in your own head. Movies and television don't always provide the kind of action or depth you can find in videogames as they are limited by program length, budgets and special effects abilities. Videogames tie the longevity of TV series, the details of a book, and the visuals of a movie all together. Malik gives an example of these multimedia features all coming together in *Halo*.

> Halo has a huge backstory to it, they have an entire group that helps write books and helps write the stories to each game, and now there's a movie so it's important that nothing conflicts. When they were originally making it, it was just a game, but they realized that for everything to make sense they had to add that backstory. Now it's got several graphic novels, several movies, two games, another expansion for the game coming out soon, and everything sort of ties in everywhere and makes sense. That way you're not asking yourself "Why am I doing this?" and if you do wonder, there's a reason and you can find it out. You can find out by Googling, and then finding a site that gives information. There are big groups of people dedicated to just talking about the war in World of Warcraft, and what's going on, and they write it down so you can understand what's going on.

Backstory may be revealed by various means, including flashbacks, dialogue, direct narration, summary, recollection, and exposition. It may eventually be published as a story in its own right in a prequel. Nelo explains the possible ways a gamer can access the backstory and points out that with books, the reader's questions may remain unanswered.

> If you have questions, you can find out, which is different from reading a book. Books have a prologue or something, but with games there is an entire lexicon of stuff that the writers have to go through to make sure that nothing changes. With games, you can always find the backstory somewhere because people are either writing about it, or with smaller games, the developers will put it somewhere in the game for people to find and there's usually a wiki about the game that's got lots of information.

Malik alludes to the large number of people working on a game as well as working to better understand the game and its complexities. The game story is one way that members of the gaming community come together. They discuss plot, character and setting the same way other people discuss books or movies. The ability to join the gaming community online allows for gamers and developers to interact. Conventions also afford large numbers of fans to get to meet developers in person. In these cyber and real world spaces all aspects of the games are critiqued.

Additionally, the complexities of videogame stories encourage players to tackle challenging traditional texts, including Shakespeare. Malik shares his new-found enthusiasm for Hamlet and Macbeth, not put off by their complex plots and language as he has had considerable engagement with the intertwined, multi-layered machinations of *League of Legends*, *Halo 3*, and *Mortal Combat*. He is more likely to work hard at reading the text because, as with videogames, he wants to engage with the story and find out what happens to the characters.

> The characters are really important in creating continuity in the story, and between the main story and the backstory. The characters make the story interesting and help to explain the connection between different parts of the story.

The complexities of videogame stories can be played out through the characters. They are a medium through which players learn about backstory and the main narrative. They also afford the sometimes collaborative and sometimes competitive nature of the game, both leading to an increase in the attention a player must pay during games. Part of the draw for players is the control they obtain during play as they get to create their character's look, choose their powers and determine their actions. These character personalization aspects combine with the story to position the gamer into a prosumer role. Mia's engagement includes her acting *in* the game and having the opportunity to act *on* the game also, through her ability to cater aspects of the game to her tastes.

> … the people, the characters, and the storyline- it's like reading a book but you get to play it and you get to be that person. And it's like kind of escaping- you know like out of the real world. (Mia)

## "There's Always a Way…": Strategizing for Learning … and Preparing for Adult Life

Through immersive and deep engagement with videogames, their back stories and characters, and the reflective interactions of players as they work through the challenges of their characters' lives, they learn to problem-solve and strategize in sophisticated ways. Utilizing tools and resources that did not exist for previous generations, youth engage multiple aids for solving problems and determining the way forward.

Youth today are very different from youth of previous generations—they have different opportunities, different challenges and different interests. And although we

are constantly told that kids at the moment aren't measuring up, they don't work as hard, they are lazy and inconsistent, we have robust evidence to support just the opposite. Many adolescents know a lot of things, they know how to find out things, and they think deeply about the world and their place in it. They wonder about things—and then they go and find out, using their networks effectively and efficiently.

The world is different; families are different—more complex, more rapidly changing. This is the first time, we are told, that youth know more than their elders. They have greater access to information, ideas, and learning tools. They can talk to people around the world, research whatever interests them, share their knowledge with others, and inhabit exciting new worlds through videogames. They game, and they also blog, tweet, and Facebook. Most of us still think of these words as nouns, but these are activities that youth perform regularly in the course of their day. And they do these activities in interconnected ways. Beginning a new mission in *Halo Reach* takes them to a blog or a YouTube clip that helps them understand the goals of the game, connect with new friends, and strategize ways to win.

Nelo and Malik, two youth who have been video gaming for most of their lives, use ongoing talk about learning as they strategize through a videogame. They have played together a lot, for several years now, so they can often play without verbal communication, reading each other's cues and informal communication. When they're playing *Halo 3*, they can read each other's positions on the map, know how each other plays, and know how to complement each other's actions. They find that it's a lot easier, when they're working with people they know and understand how they play, to play silently. If, however, they are playing with people they don't know, they've learned to first watch them play, finding out if they're more aggressive or defensive players, or whether they hide and surprise other teammates—figuring out their strategies. For example, Malik's a 'sneaky' player—as a prosumer he both draws on the original storyline and creates his own as he interacts with other players of the enemy team. One strategy he has developed in creating his storyline is that he runs around a corner where Nelo is standing so they can both target one opposition player—and when they use that strategy, that player loses most of the time. So Nelo knows what most people will do when Malik uses this strategy—they run ahead to try to follow Malik. Malik, however, turns around and goes back behind a corner, so the opposition player is out there all alone and gets caught. Malik and Nelo's team nearly always find success and earn valuable experience points to advance them ahead in the game.

Nelo and Malik also strategize when they're putting their own team of characters together—they have identified their strengths and weakness, so when they get to select which teammates they play with, they can organize which characters they play—who has good defense, who's good at offense—to complement each other. When they play a pick-up game (PUG) with unknown teammates, they initially stick together and observe how their team is doing and try to adapt their own style of play to better work as a team. If their team doesn't cooperate when picking characters, they're going to get walked all over because they don't have what it takes to slow down or trap their enemies. This strategy requires that they understand characterization well and know how character informs plot.

Nelo has developed strategies not only for succeeding in winning missions or games, he also has learned how to increase his vocabulary through interacting with teammates. He notes that lots of words in our language are hard to understand and meanings are hidden everywhere but they're very context-based. For example, his team was considering choices and one member said that he chose the latter choice. Nelo didn't know what 'latter' meant, but he had six people he was working with educate him very quickly. In addition to asking others, he would also look up a word, Google it, try to type out what he thought the word would look like, but sometimes he didn't find the right word. The best approach, he has found, is to ask his friends and they'll tell him how they came upon it and what it means. He has found lots of words in videogames that have added to his general knowledge, words that have been useful in understanding other everyday contexts. Through the game *Starcraft*, for example, Nelo has learned the meaning of 'zealot', and he has learned about 'sentient beings' through games like *Guild Wars* and *Halo 3*.

The development of an enhanced vocabulary is important for Nelo and Malik, and other youth, for many reasons. First of all, they have a greater ability to articulate their ideas to their teammates and to others. Understanding people who play these roles gives them the ability to develop more thorough and complex strategizing for gameplay. Also, knowing the word 'zealot' and understanding the concept of an immoderate, fanatical, or extremely zealous adherent to a cause enables them to have a greater awareness and consideration of issues in the real world and of people who play these roles in real life.

And they do think deeply about important issues. Selecting to play a 'good' or and 'evil' character lets them strategize for winning, but then makes them think about the impact their choices make for the others in the game and the outcome of the game—and of life. Making a choice to kill someone in the game, for example, has a long-term impact on the way they can play and live the rest of their lives in the game—they are shunned, ostracized, ignored. They feel lonely and miserable, and they recognize that there were better strategies for the game, but also that there are better choices for the way we can live our lives.

Videogames require strategizing, whether it's simple puzzle games like *Bejewelled* or complex games involving conquering whole new worlds like *World of Warcraft* or *Mass Effect*. Nelo and Malik have strategized, both on their own and in their teams, about the best way to play missions and entire games. But more importantly, they continually strategize about how to best work together, with teammates that they know and with members they have only just met. They have come to recognize approaches that allow them to be successful and approaches that have disastrous results for the outcome of the game and for the survival of the team itself. Learning these strategies have had positive outcomes for both Nelo and Malik in gameplay and in their adult lives of work and postsecondary education. Nelo has clearly demonstrated leadership skills in his classes at school and has honed his communication skills with friends and with new acquaintances. His vocabulary, understanding of goals and ways to accomplish goals, have supported his success in school and work as well as in games. Malik has shown his confidence has improved through participating in presentations to student teachers about his gaming experiences. Both Nelo

**Fig. 3.3**  Nelo and Malik presenting at a National conference

and Malik have talked about the positive skills and attitudes they have acquired for completing, collaborating, learning, sharing, winning, having fun, and gaining sense of accomplishment and caring about others in the games and in the world around them (See Fig. 3.3).

Developing sensitivity and awareness of the experiences of others, creating conditions for supported learning, and developing meaningful relationships with teammates shape attitudes that prepare them for thoughtful engagement in the adult world, as they acquire skills, understandings, and attitudes needed in both virtual and real life experiences. It is this ability to see the world through multiple perspectives, to seek alternative approaches, to critically question actions and values, and to respond thoughtfully to diverse views of the game and of the world that we feel is needed for meaningful civic engagement in twenty-first century society.

## "It's the Golden Rule all Around!"

> This is one of the points where videogames not only apply in real life, but real life applies in video games … you do unto others as you wish them to do to you. (Nelo)

The three themes that emerged from our research project are interconnected in integral and complex ways. Gameplay requires ongoing and sophisticated ethical decision-making, that is in part enabled through deep understandings of story structures, characterization, and motivation. And not only are players required to 'read'

the story, they are active participants in creating new storylines and character decision-making, strategizing ways forward using ethical reasoning/approaches. The distributed nature of their engagement connects cognitive and emotional responses, enhancing the power of the game. As prosumers, they are at the same time reading and writing the story, a story that can be read in myriad ways depending on the strategies utilized. These deep literacy engagements inform how they live out their lives in the 'real' world, shaping their interactions with others, with problems, and with their own ethical dilemmas.

The diverse and interconnected literacies that are continually utilized by players in sophisticated, immersive games create opportunities to use new skills, new tools, and new ways of thinking. Their understandings emerge naturally through their meaningful engagement in complex stories, as they utilize the liberating constraints established in the game to frame their learning, creating the redundancy necessary to share their learning with others. As we recognize the depth and breadth of gameplayers' literacy knowledge and abilities, we also recognize the need for us as teachers and parents to develop our understanding of rules, vocabulary, and conditions that enable this learning to happen, so that we might engage with youth and their literacies.

There has been little research conducted that links the literacy skills and knowledge developed by adolescents through videogame play in out-of-school environments with their development as civically-minded young adults. Although there has been much research pointing to the negative aspects of videogame play, or to physiological and behavioural influences on gamers, the focus of our research has been on better understanding the relationship between youths' engagement with commercial videogames, their learning of twenty-first century literacies, and the potential transfer of these skills to 'real life' spaces and experiences for meaningful adult civic engagement. It has explored the shifts that enable youth to develop the potential to positively engage with the twenty-first century in new and productive ways (Susi et al. 2007). As youth continue to engage in multimodal forms of literacy, and as we prepare them for complexities of the adult world, it is important for literacy educators to understand the types of literacies youth are learning, where and how they are using their literacy skills. Videogame literacies are integrally connected to the myriad other literacies that children and youth are developing through engagement with twenty-first century texts and tools; understanding their lived realities can better enable us to work productively with them in formal and informal settings.

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# Chapter 4
# Public Pedagogies of Street-entrenched Youth: New Literacies, Identity and Social Critique

**Theresa Rogers, Sara Schroeter, Amanda Wager and Chelsey Hague**

> *"Are you people fucking retarded?"*
> *—a street youth commenting on his public audience*

In this chapter we describe a project in which we investigated the ways street youth engage in public life through informal educational opportunities in one urban centre in Canada. We explore the contradictions and complexities of these engagements, particularly when youth might be understood as living with "precarity" (Butler 2009)—a condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support. Such precarious subjects, Butler argues, struggle to be legible and recognizable within established societal norms. Our work asks how, as scholars, educators and community members, we might reconsider ways to support these youth in their efforts to become legible and recognizable citizens through complex discursive participation in civic life.

Street-entrenched youth is a term used to refer young people, generally aged 16–24, who spend a significant amount of time on the streets as squatters, at youth shelters and centers, or as couch-surfers. Over the past several years, we have worked with street-entrenched youth in the context of creating a series of "zines," an anthology of collected writings (Rogers and Winters 2010), an iTunes University video project, and a theatre performance (Wager et al. 2009). Within these contexts, we began to ask larger questions about the role of various kinds of educational

T. Rogers (✉) · S. Schroeter · A. Wager · C. Hague
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
e-mail: theresa.rogers@ubc.ca

S. Schroeter
e-mail: sara.schroeter@gmail.com

A. Wager
e-mail: wageramanda@gmail.com

C. Hague
e-mail: chelseyhauge@gmail.com

opportunities take up by these youth as they continuously develop their identities and goals. To address these questions, we conducted a case study that included extended interviews with five youth in which we asked about the various kinds of learning opportunities they accessed. We then contextualized their comments—not only within our knowledge of the projects they had participated in, but also in relation to larger cultural discourses—in order to more carefully read the ways they draw on a range of resources associated with new literacies to both inscribe themselves in and resist surrounding normative cultural discourses.

## Literacies, Identities and Public Pedagogies

We begin by outlining some of the key theoretical and intersecting frameworks that inform our interpretations of the interviews with the youth, particularly notions of literacy, identity, and public pedagogy. We view literacy from the broader perspectives of "new literacies," (Lankshear and Knobel 2003) defined by "the rapid and continuous changes in the ways in which we read, write, view, listen, compose and communicate information" (Coiro et al. 2008, p. 8), as well as "participatory cultures" and new media (Jenkins et al. 2009). As many researchers in these areas illustrate, youth have become prolific producers of new forms of literacy and media as they participate in, comment on and critique their social worlds (Burn and Parker 2003; Hill and Vasudevan 2008; Hull and Nelson 2005; Jenkins et al. 2009; Kendrick et al. 2010; Morrell 2007; Rogers 2009; Rogers et al. 2010; Rogers and Winters 2010; Sefton-Green 1998, 2006; Soep 2006). In this chapter we draw on these broad understandings of new literacy and media practices of youth to understand how they define and describe their use, and indeed their appropriation, of these resources to engage in public life and cultural critique.

    In their descriptions of engaging in these practices, youth often explicitly or implicitly discursively position themselves as they are constructing and negotiating their identities. Current theories of social/cultural identity, agency, and discursive subject positioning argue that this identity work is both situated and fluid. For instance, Davies and Harré (1990/2007) provide a useful perspective on the ways individuals position themselves and others in jointly produced storylines, and view the world in terms of the images, metaphors and concepts in relation to the "discursive practice in which they are positioned" (p. 46). Holland et al. (2001), drawing on Bakhtinian theory, similarly illustrate how identities are formed (improvised) in the flow of historically, socially, culturally and materially shaped lives. They emphasize the role of agency in this process as individuals move from one set of socially and culturally formed subjectivities to another. This approach helps us to see the ways in which youth are continuously engaged in analyzing their social and cultural contexts, both recognizing and resisting power (including that of the researchers) in various ways (Cammarota and Fine 2008; Dillabough and Kennelly 2010). We found this perspective useful in understanding how the youth in our study represented both their identity positionings and engaged in identity work throughout their interviews.

We also examine contemporary views of informal learning and public pedagogy to analyze the nature of public engagement of the youth, and their perspectives on those engagements. To understanding these engagements in relation to broader views of education, it is useful to acknowledge the continuum of formal and informal learning practices and focus more of our attention on informal learning among self-educating communities (Bekerman et al. 2006). We conceptualize "informal learning opportunities" as any context that provides an alternative to formal learning contexts, such as schools, while "alternative pedagogies" include contexts and projects that have a social activist or political component (Sandlin et al. 2010b). Such attention to different kinds of learning in community settings can help us to understand the connections between education and public life, and further theorize the recent notions of the role of "public pedagogy" (Giroux 2000; Sandlin et al. 2010a) in the lives of young people.

Public pedagogy is an important site of investigation among feminist and critical theorists for examining and valorizing the kinds of learning that occurs outside the boundaries of schools and state sanctioned curricula (Sandlin et al. 2011). We use the term to signify activities that broadly qualify as pedagogical as they involve some kind of informal learning and, more significantly, engage the youth in various forms of creative engagement and community involvement (alternative pedagogies), sometimes reaching toward social and political activism. Such activities brought the youth into contact with a variety of social actors within the wider municipal and national community, and contributed to shaping their social interactions and public engagement (see also Rogers, Winters, Perry and LaMonde, 2014).

Research on public pedagogy, as argued by Sandlin et al. (2010a), requires a contextualized sensibility towards research and theorizing, drawing on a range of cultural discourses, while seeking "to inhabit complex and ambiguous spaces of pedagogical address" (p. 3) as, in this case, the lives and literacies of street-entrenched youth. We would add that these pedagogies are relational to the multiple publics and counter-publics that they address (Warner 2002). In this case, street youth used new literacies to address, resist and respond to civic issues in ways that, at times, can be understood to constitute public engagement. New literacies, including media literacies such as blogging, design, and video production, are often taken up in ways that suggest possibilities for new forms of public engagement by marginalized youth who, historically, have not had ample access to participate in public life (Hull 2003; Jenkins 2006; Rheingold 2008).

## A Case Study of Street-Entrenched Youth Literacy Practices

In our project, we used a case study methodology (Stake 1995) with ethnographic data collection approaches (observing, interviewing, gathering documents) to examine the range of learning opportunities or public pedagogies taken up by street-entrenched youth, how they access it, and for what purposes. The context of this study was an extension of work with street-entrenched youth who accessed an

urban youth services centre where members of our research team had previously supported a zine project and were, at the time of the study, supporting a video project. The kinds of informal learning that these youth access in and beyond the centre include: engaging in arts advocacy programs and performances (e.g. visual art, music, theatre), often with a social justice theme; work-shopping and publishing a variety of writings such as the zine by and for homeless youth; accessing harm reduction education and materials in centres (e.g. HIV/AIDS awareness); participating in video and filmmaking programs; receiving work training and experiences that include mentoring in skills and behaviors that prepare them for the workforce; and attending programs such as a university Humanities 101 Community Program. Often products emanating from these educational opportunities are shared with local peers and communities, and more broadly on websites devoted to homeless issues. We conducted a case study of five focal youth (Karma, Fraggle, Trevor, Carter, and Steven), ages 18 to 24, who were at the time, or had been, participating in one or more of these learning opportunities. Karma, Fraggle, and Carter are young women, and Trevor and Steven are young men. To the best of our knowledge, four of the youth are White and one, Trevor, self identifies as half native Fijan and half Euro-Canadian.

The five youth participated in semi-structured, audio-taped interviews, each lasting 20 to 30 min, comprised of questions about the kinds of informal or alternative learning opportunities they engaged in, their level of participation, the particular activities involved, their perceptions of their learning, the usefulness of skills acquired, and other kinds of learning opportunities they sought. Each was paid 20 $ to participate in the interview. We also observed or worked directly with four of the five youth as they participated in the filmmaking project and/or other informal learning experiences, such as an online zine (www.anotherslice.ca), a poetry anthology (Mills and Rogers 2009), artwork, and photography projects. Finally, we took observational field notes and collected artifacts produced as a result of the youth's engagement in these activities. These observations and artifacts served to deepen our analyses and interpretations of the interview transcripts. All four author/researchers engaged in analysis and discussion to corroborate our interpretations.

Our approach to analyzing the interview data consisted of two-levels: thematic coding and a discourse analysis of intertextual identity positioning. The thematic coding consisted of analyzing the transcripts for four key themes from the literature above: the role of identity in relation to learning, the role of informal and/or alternative pedagogies in the youth's lives, engagement in new literacies and media, and the relationship between informal learning and public life for these youth. Using these guiding themes, all members of the research team analyzed a particular youth interview, respectively; after individually analyzing the interview, as a group we discussed how and why we interpreted various themes, looked at agreements and disagreements, and developed procedures for double-coding when necessary. We then re-coded the themes for that interview together, and coded the four remaining interviews individually.

We acknowledge that the interview process is itself socially constructed. Drawing on the work of Chase (2005), we looked for instances of the possible relationships

between the youths' positioning of themselves and the social and cultural circumstances that both enable and constrain those positionings, including our individual ongoing responses, analytic interpretations and past relationships with the youth. That is, we see the interviews as jointly shaped constructions of the interviewer and interviewee (Briggs 1986, 2002) that involve power relations in the interview itself and its use in the circulation of discourses (Briggs 2002) that favor the institutional ends it serves.

One approach to mitigating and understanding that power imbalance in our analyses is to make the interview process and analysis as transparent as possible, including the ways in which the youth challenged and resisted us as interviewers, and as white academic women, and the assumptions and authoritative statements and discourses we voiced or represented. We therefore undertook a second level of analysis—an intertextual discourse analysis that draws on Bakhtinian notions of horizontal and vertical relations of double-voicing (Bakhtin et al. 1986). An analysis of horizontal intertextuality focuses on statements in a chain of utterances (Kristeva 1986) that precede and follow it. In this case, focus is on the ways in which the interviewees (the youth) were in dialogue with us as interviewers. An analysis of vertical intertextuality examines relations between the utterances and other "texts" or discourses in less immediate or more distant space and time contexts. These other texts and discourses included domains such as family, peers, institutions, the public, etc. We looked for ways these horizontal and vertical intertextual discourses were resisted by the youth (circumvented, challenged, redefined, or transformed through sarcasm and/or ironic re-voicing). We therefore looked at the ways in which the youth were simultaneously in dialogue with us and with others outside of the interview via double-voicing that referenced individuals or larger cultural discourses, as these references are key to our interpretations of their engagements with literacy, education and society.

## Repositionings: Identity and Learning Among Street-Entrenched Youth

Informed by the work of Holland et al. (2001) in terms of identity, we looked at the ways the youth discursively positioned themselves as street-entrenched youth, and in relation to being learners and attendant possibilities for expression and the complexity and limits of self-representation. In their interviews, several of the youth resisted the label of "street youth" by redefining it in a variety of ways, including having lived on the streets, but not as a youth, or challenging the label of "homelessness." Steven, in response to being asked by the interviewer how long he had been on the street, said that although he had been on and off the streets since he was 15:

S:   I don't really consider it homelessness anymore, I just think of myself as a hermit crab.
I:   A hermit crab, hey?

S:    Well, 'cause I travel around with my pack and I, even if all I have with me is
      my pack, I usually have like a tent with me, so I always have shelter, regardless
      of whether or not I have like a place that I'm renting, or a mailing address or
      whatever, I always have like a place to sleep where I'm sheltered.

Karma invokes a more distant or authoritative discourse and audience, challenging
perceptions of homeless youth and the homeless body. She noted that though she
was interested in photojournalism and had many related skills (writing a lot and
publishing on blogs):

   "it's just hard [to get into school or get a job]. People look at you different when
you live on the streets. I mean, I have a home, but I don't have money and I don't have
the best clothes so a lot of people look at me a hell of a lot different. It's sad….some
people are like 'oh you have piercings and you have tattoos, you might not be a good
worker.' Well I've got news for ya, I've done the same amount of work to get where
I am and you really don't have the right to judge me." Karma's comment highlights
the difficulties street-entrenched youth face on the job market and the prevalence of
stereotyping, although it is interesting that she does not question the assumptions that
piercings and tattoos necessarily characterize people as homeless or unemployed.

   At times, several of the youth spoke directly and somewhat more positively and
in celebratory ways about the relationship between their identity, informal learning
opportunities and their engagement with others and with the community. Trevor,
for instance, spoke about a peer-training program in a shelter. They were trained in
crisis intervention, suicide prevention, and issues related to drugs and alcohol ad-
diction. He said, "I think … just my experience … that I've gone through in life….
I think it really gave me tools and skills and a mindset that, you know, have made
me really want to give back to young people."

   However, in an example of resistance, Trevor challenged a family narrative re-
lated to his identity: "… my grandma told me, you know, you never change as a
person, you're always gonna be the same person as you are when you're born, and
you know I believed that for so many years until, I think I was like 19 and I realized
that you know what, you can change as a person … I think I've totally changed….
Everything that I do has really contributed to who I am as a person … better as a
person." It is possible that Trevor was attempting to distance himself from a family
discourse he found personally damaging, or his statement might be the result of the
training he received at the youth center. That is, one of the foundational discourses
of such programs is the insistence that an individual can change if they want to and
put his or her mind to it, and Trevor is discursively situating himself within that
public in ways that reflect that program's values and foundations.

## New Literacies as Critical Discursive Resources

When the youth talk about the literacy skills they have gained through their partici-
pation in youth programs, they don't always focus on the written work they have
done. For the most part, the youth interviewed reference other kinds of literacies

**Fig. 4.1** Karma's fundraising
poster



they either gained as a result of their participation in programs or, at the very least developed a vocabulary for. Others learned of new abilities and talents (e.g. performing, photography) and ways to express themselves via informal learning experiences. As Karma said, "When I can come (to the zine meetings) and just vent and blog it helps me from taking it out on someone else." She also mentioned the benefits of working with others: "the people I've met, you know, just hearing about the different experiences and being able to learn from [them]." Carter felt she that the experiences helped her to learn how "to react to people in different situations… and deal with all the different types of people." In other words, by participating in various programs she has learned to try not to judge others and react to them before trying to gain an understanding of their comments and perspectives.

Trevor said that he is not a writer, but that he learned about writing and blogging while doing the theatre project. For example, he describes learning how to take a journal entry and turn it into a script as empowering. Both Fraggle and Trevor talk about how interesting it is to take something that has been written formally or informally and turn it into something else by translating or transmediating it into a play script or theatrical performance, or a film, both representing issues related to homelessness and the lack of youth safe houses. Karma also spoke in detail about how she used multimodal layering techniques to create an outreach poster for a backpack fundraiser for street youth: "… and I was asked to do a poster … it's my design … and what I did was I used Adobe Photoshop and I drew a backpack and then I put the backpack on—like I scanned it and the I put it in the program [text] and then I added in, like the patches and stuff, using a layering technique" (Fig. 4.1).

These few examples serve to illustrate how the youth's shifting and complex identity positions were often integrally related to, and articulated within, the ways

**Fig. 4.2**  A photo by Carter
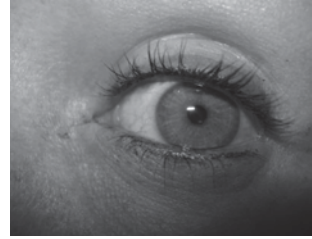


in which they engaged with multimodal discursive and material resources for a range of private and more public, critical engagement (Rogers and Winters 2010; Rogers et al. 2010).

## Informal Learning Opportunities as Alternative or Public Pedagogies

As noted above, we conceptualize "informal learning opportunities" as any context that provides an alternative to formal learning contexts, such as schools, while "alternative pedagogies" include contexts and projects that have a social activist or political component (Sandlin et al. 2010b). The youth engaged in a range of informal learning opportunities, such as training programs, university sponsored courses for the public such as Humanities 101, using the library as a resource for their own reading, keeping journals, accessing centres for art projects or to learn technological skills, etc. Several talked about how traditional schooling had not served them well and actively looked for less formal learning environments for rendering and making visible more artistic expressions of their lifeworlds. For instance Carter talked about using black and white photography to represent the "drabbiness" of certain situations she found herself in (see Fig. 4.2).

Alternative learning contexts, in particular, often included a clear critical or activist component. Fraggle, for instance, described an experience participating in a forum theatre project (Diamond 2009) where she, and other homeless and formerly homeless cast members constructed a collaborative outline of a play. The storyline stemmed from a weaving of their stories and individual character creations. In a forum theatre production, after an initial run-through of the play the director invites audience members onstage to try to change an outcome of a scene. Fraggle, along with the cast and audience members, performed *After Homelessness* in front of multiple audiences. The play was created and performed to further awareness and advocacy of the challenges of assimilating back into housed living after homelessness.

Steven, who also felt that traditional schooling had not served him well, preferred engaging in his own self-directed program of reading and writing. During the filmmaking project we worked with him on developing a storyboard for a video
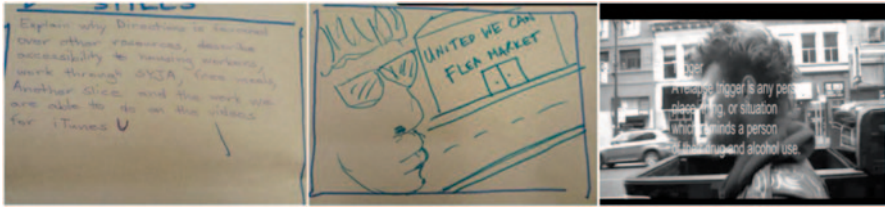
**Fig. 4.3** Story board notes and sketches and film shot from Steven's storyboard

about the issue of "triggers" in the Downtown East Side—an area in Vancouver commonly associated homelessness and other social issues (Fig. 4.3).

Within this part of town there are many free services provided for the homeless, but the area is also known for its drug accessibility. As Steven points out, this presents a daily dilemma for many street-entrenched youth because entering this part of town can easily trigger their addictions.

These alternative learning opportunities often served a clear critical purpose, such as when Karma described an essay she wrote for Humanities 101 outlining the similarities between a university student and a drug dealer: "… both have to learn scheduling. Like a student needs to be on time for class and to be able to get the grades, not to lose the money on their tuition. The drug dealer needs to be able to make it on time to their clients and keep their money and not lose that. Um, they both have to have financial skills, mathematical skills, lots of stuff like that." The ironic tone of Karma's essay carries a critique of the ways in which particular kinds of learning and education are culturally privileged.

In another theatre performance example, Fraggle and Trevor described their yearlong work as part of the play, *Surviving in the Cracks* (Wager et al. 2009), a collaborative production about youth experiences of living on the streets after governmental funding was cut for emergency youth safe houses. The creation of the play, drawing from youth journaling about their experiences of living on the streets and transcribing their oral stories, was a public pedagogical experience that involved youth writing, reading, editing, acting, and advocating. Fraggle and Trevor described the process as a way to use the arts to "spread a message" and "give voice" in a public forum.

## Learning and Public Engagement: Legibility and Recognizability

Woven throughout the youth's interviews are references to public life and giving back, and more specifically, to building a desire, as Fraggle says, "to talk about the social justice stuff" and to "make a difference…. to change stuff." As an older youth who is no longer homeless, Fraggle spoke about helping other pregnant youth,

**The Truth (hurts)**
by Fraggle Rawk

This one is for you
you with the starbucks 100 dollar haircut
you there, the one with mcmurder double
cheeseburger super happiness
the one on the cell phone that drives 100,000 dead iraqi
mobile
to all the girls with something to prove,
mini skirt madness on granville street
to all the pretentious hippie cats that think
smoking pot will solve the worlds problems
to all you douchebags, the roxy-roofie-colada-wet-
dream-hair-gel types
the ones who listen to britney spears, lindsay lohan and
think they piss perfume
the suits with expensive ties that could feed an African
family for a year
i know you probably dont hear me
im not sure that i speak your language
i know you probably cant see me
money seems to make one conspicuous enough to
acknowledge
now please, before you spit on me, study me or sweep
me underneath your carpet that
stretches on like the sea
sit on this concrete
tell me how it feels
sleep under these stars
tell me how you sleep
if we strip away the layers
that make you who you think you are
what is left for you?
if we take away your cell phone
who is talking now?
If it were all to come crashing down
who will be the one left shivering in the cold?

I've come to find myself quite comfortable under this
carpet below the poverty line
my comfort is in the knowledge of the
life that i know is real
for life isn't cocktail parties and orgy's in oil
when it all comes crashing down
i will be the one to take your hand
tell you that there is life beyond yourline of credit
money can't save your soul
the truth shall set you free
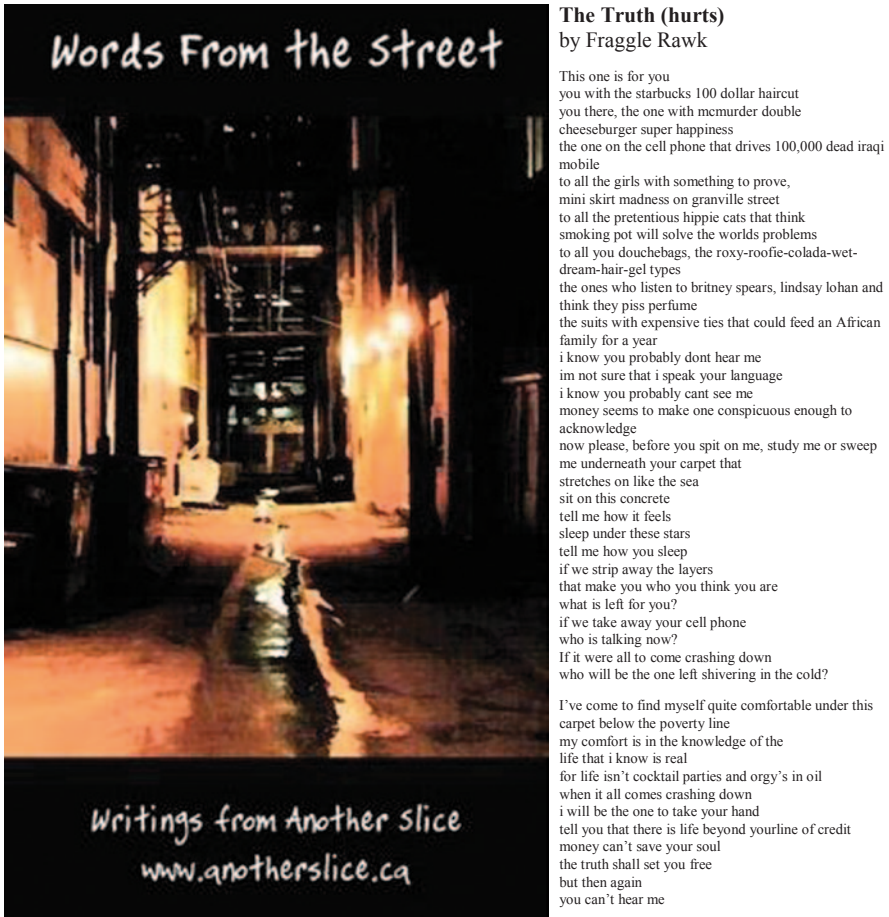but then again
you can't hear me

**Fig. 4.4** The anthology of writing by street-entrenched youth with a poem by Fraggle

participating in the two plays about homelessness, and writing about street life in the zine and for a poetry anthology. The poem, below, entitled "The Truth" carries a clear and stinging critique of the ways homeless youth are judged and pointedly reflects those judgments back on the addressee (Fig. 4.4).

However, Fraggle also sarcastically references the first theatre project as something she did because: "well the money was good, what can I say?" While she acknowledges what she has learned as part of the theatre project, Fraggle's comment is representative of the complications of reading civic engagement into youth participation in programs meant to support marginalized youth.

Trevor, who also worked on *Surviving in the Cracks*, talked about the joy it brought him when there was a standing ovation in the full theatre: "I think it was the second that we got the standing ovation that….. I think I had some tears because…

here is something that we have spent about eight months on doing and … it's been an issue that the Vancouver Youth Vision Coalition (VYVC) have been really trying to talk about for like the last six years and the fact that we're now finally able to go back to our roots and talk about an issue that really started VYVC…. And I think the fact that we had a lot of service providers in that room who either worked in the safe houses or were impacted by the safe houses…. not only that but the amount of, the support that we got from the community…. and the fact that we have this documentary now…. that this documentary is getting so well respected and, um, in Western Canada, and …. I think if anything, that moment will … probably changed me. But I guess it's also the fact that working with young people and being able to give back." His participation in the play clearly allowed Trevor an opportunity to discuss issues important to him with a broad public. However, it is not clear that addressing the wider audience for this event has resulted in any perceptual or material changes in relation to homeless and formerly homeless youth. While the play did not set out to save these safe houses for homeless youth so much as to bring the issue at least temporarily to the attention of the public, it raises the question of legibility of street-entrenched youth in relation to their right to housing and the location of responsibility for providing that housing.

Karma talked about having been involved in political life for several years and hoped to go to university because she is "fucking smart" and is sick of people judging those who live on the streets. Her essay for Humanities 101 also serves as a vehicle for challenging institutional assumptions, and she talked about feedback she gets from posting her writing on a blog. "Like I posted a story called 'Across the country to be homeless' and it was basically my story from moving … and you know I get comments because I mention people from [this centre] on it." The story (Karma 2010; see: http://anotherslice.ca/main/2010/02/across-the-country-2-be-homeless) outlines the ways in which Karma has received support from a youth centre and also functions as an effective appeal for donations but, again, it discursively locates responsibility for political and social change on the youth.

As mentioned earlier, several of the youth worked on a series of films about homelessness that have been uploaded to iTunes University, the purposes of which are to educate academics and university students about homelessness. (see UBC iTunes U/Education/LLED/Homelessness 101). Trevor, in his photo-narrative film, uses a combination of enhanced photos, a comic strip template, and narration to identify his own problematic trajectory of foster care to independence, including drug use, and explains his commitment to helping other youth make this same transition. His narrative raises new questions about the social discourses of homelessness circulating in the larger society (i.e. that homeless youth are lazy, addicts, and runaways) and those in the programs he has accessed (portraying homeless youth as agentive subjects who can make better lives for themselves). In the concluding remarks of his photo-narrative film Trevor says, "I had witnessed the battle first hand and felt I could help younger youth with the benefit of my experience … I am now fully in control of my life. I am in a place where I am free and have the mechanisms to deal with life's challenges. Waking up every day … and giving

**Fig. 4.5** Images from Trevor's film

back is my motivation to stay clean and stay positive." Here, and at many points during his interview, Trevor seems to be performing personal "victory narratives" for a public audience and the interviewer. This leaves us questioning how much Trevor is responding to what he believes his audience and researchers want to hear in an attempt to make himself more recognizable to a larger public. His narrative challenges stereotypes about homeless youth, and provides a discourse about ways to make the most of a bad situation, but at the same time relocates power in the hands of the youth rather than in larger structural issues and more powerful societal agents (Fig. 4.5).

In a final example, Steven's storyboard for his film ("Triggers" mentioned above) links to other civic engagement activities he participated in, such as presenting to a local foundation about homelessness to over a 100 people. In this interview, he recalls speaking at the forum, where he pointed out some of the limitations of centres that serve street-entrenched youth. He ends his comments with a strong address to a public audience, expressing his frustration that they do not understand the importance of people, of staff, in serving homeless youth. Here, Steven demands legibility and recognizability as he relocates responsibility for understanding a particular social policy issues on his audience, the larger public.

S:   I said that, uh, you know, all the centres are good, it's just that there are certain quirks about them that throw them off. Like [this one] I can't access now that I'm 22, I can still come in for *Another Slice* and I can go to [the work program] until I'm 24, but I can't come in for meals unless I'm fucking starving and then I can only come in once a week at that. Um, you know, just stuff like that and I explained that, uh, sure, you know, you could give us a bunch of money and fuck everything up and make a new centre, but in the staff, in the long run it's all gonna end up coming down to the staff. You could lose all the staff that you have in these centres and hire new staff to run a new centre, and if the staff is no good, nobody's gonna use the new centre and you've just fucking wasted everything that we've had.
I:   It's all about the staff.
S:   Yeah. And it's funny 'cause, like, everybody, that was like a real "ding!" for like the whole fucking room.
I:   Really?
S:   Yeah, it kind of blew my mind. It was like, are you people fucking retarded?

## Recognizing Legible Identities, Literacies, and Public Pedagogies of Street-Entrenched Youth

In terms of identity positioning, self-expression and representation, the youth resisted labels imposed on them and worked to reposition themselves in relation to homelessness while challenging dominant cultural discourses about homeless people. For example, Trevor stated, "I guess you could kinda say I am a street youth, but in my eyes, I have never looked at it that I am a street youth." In fact, the youth often redefined the experience of homelessness, or temporarily experiencing it, as a way to access new spaces of learning, new talents and abilities, and to develop new social skills. They accessed a range of informal learning opportunities and talked about how these experiences helped them to speak to broader audiences and respond in more productive ways in public settings. They also appropriated these spaces as sites from which to address the public and critique cultural discourses and policies. It is clear that they engaged in a range of multimodal artistic and participatory or new literacy practices, from blogging, to photography, to video making, to playwriting and performing, to express and reposition their identities and to engage in this public discourse. Their work speaks to assumed rights to housing, delivery of services, and education. Much of their work resulted from or resulted in participating in public life—creating what Sandlin et al. (2010a) refer to as complex sites of pedagogical address that constitute a form of public pedagogy.

We might argue, then, that these alternative learning spaces offer youth sites in which to appropriate the tools of new literacies and media to engage in creative expression, social critique and social action, often providing new skills, opportunities, and financial benefits. And we can, via an analysis of the youth discourses in relation to larger discourses, examine as we have here the intersections of multimodal/multi-genre literacies, subject positionings and civic engagement among youth in these informal learning contexts as a form of public pedagogy.

However we, and the youth, acknowledge that they sometimes engage in public life because the informal learning opportunities available, and provided to them, are structured in ways that often funds this type of engagement. The social system is often set up in a way that places a higher burden for engagement in public life on those who are "benefiting" from social programs, whereas youth who do not wind up on the street, who do not experience this precarity, are not required to be as engaged in public life. There are too few options available for street-entrenched youth to make money, which makes these projects even more valuable to them as a means of survival and which signals the many and often contradicting reasons for which youth participate in these programs at all. We should therefore be cautious about the agentive qualities celebrated at the intersection of youth, new literacies, and public engagement, based in the persistent belief these engagements are necessarily indicative of progress and civic engagement (Barney 2000; Gajjala 2004; Hindman 2008; Poyntz 2008). We caution against requiring youth to provide social and political change, and to take responsibility to be the change agents, without also holding a larger public and society—those they address—at least as responsible for advancing social justice.

What these youth teach us through their complex discursive participation in civic life, drawing on the resources of new literacies and informal learning projects and alternative pedagogies, is the ways they are engaging, reproducing and resisting larger societal and cultural discourses as they seek to make themselves, as precarious subjects, more legible and recognizable public citizens.

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# Chapter 5
# "My Film Will Change the World … or Something": Youth Media Production as "Social Text"

**Lori McIntosh**

## Introduction

In an era thoroughly steeped in the rhetorics of acceptance and tolerance, attempting to represent queerness—what Muñoz (2009) calls 'the ephemeral traces' of bodies that can refute the consumptive and reifying demands of neoliberal discourses—has become all but impossible, particularly for queer and gender variant youth. This chapter is derived from a two- year extended case study (including observations, interviews, and film analyses). The larger project seeks to explore the ways in which queer youth represent "queerness" and homophobia writ large through digital media production, and examine the various discourses they leverage and negotiate in the process (MacIntosh 2013). This chapter focuses on the youth media production section of the research vis-à-vis *Out in Schools* (*OIS*), a media based urban community organization in Vancouver, Canada that runs a one-week filmmaking camp for self-identified Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer or Allied aspiring youth filmmakers. The organization also functions throughout the school year, taking film, much of it youth produced, into educational settings throughout British Columbia in the hopes of breaking silences surrounding sexualities and gender diversity. Because of its location at the nexus of a number of key issues of critical literacies, the boot-camp offers an useful exemplar of a cycle of knowledge production about the queer body, including the recirculation of formal and informal school-based knowledges, the educative force of peer-to-peer media production, and the pedagogical flow of youth voice. Anti-homophobia discourses and the various heteronormative and homonormative social texts in which these discourses are located are also considered. Focusing on youth perspectives of (anti)homophobia and the degree to which antihomophobia messaging is reproduced in youth media, highlights the significant role these sociopolitical texts play in the development of youth identity, and subsequently identity's relation to media literacy (Ashcraft 2012).

L. McIntosh (✉)
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada
e-mail: l.macintosh@alumni.ubc.ca

As part of the informal learning that informs this project, interviewees considered the climate at their respective schools in relation to homophobia, through which youth participants engaged in and reflect upon key moments of their identificatory production. What if, as Vadeboncoeur (2005) suggests, "what we see and hear and 'know' about 'adolescents' as a society, or nexus of industrialised societies, is more a function of social discourses, practices; and expectations than a function of the young people to whom we refer" (p. 5)? That is, in thinking through the constructions of those whom we call youth or adolescents, and the sub-categorizations of "at-risk," "gay," "homosexual," et cetera, we ought think about them in conjunction with *how* those constructions are produced as social discourses and practices –namely, as a type of social text that youth draw upon in their articulations of self, both informally through peer-to-peer relations and formally in the production of media artifacts.

The larger project was constructed, in part, as a study of new literacy practices among marginalized youth. Here, new literacies is understood, following Sefton-Green et al. (2009) and Gee (2000), to be knowledge and literacy practices construed as "constructions of particular social groups, rather than attributed to individual cognition alone" (Mills 2010, p. 247). Moje et al. (2000), argue that particularly in secondary school settings "[t]he constructs of identity/ies and subjectivity/ies are important in literacy and language research because the ways young people use literacy and language can influence how they are positioned as well as their access to further literacy and language learning" (p. 166). More recently, Ashcraft (2012) has similarly identified the sociopolitical significance critical literacies and new literacies play in shaping ones learning and literacy practices, noting that "these connections between identity, literacy, and learning influence youth's future life opportunities, their position in the social order, and social relations, at large" (p. 600). It is, then, of particular significance to understand the relationship between the role literacy and language practices play in the social development and identificatory practices of those youth already marginalized.

## Homophobia in Neoliberal Times

*Homophobia* is a widely used and often overly generalized term. In light of the space of tension the term occupies, it was important to ask youth to communicate their understandings of it. Not surprisingly, students had much to say about how they defined and interpreted homophobia and its related pedagogies. One student (all students who turned in the written feedback in classes were anonymous), who was amongst those asked to write a reflection as a class assignment in response to an *OIS* presentation, declared:

> Homophobia is the fear of homosexuality and is discrimination; it can be cause for hate crimes and also causes suicide in teenagers. This discrimination causes queer students and adults to be scared to come to their own school or workplace, and can be the cause for depression.

In general, throughout their responses, students were quite familiar with homophobia and the notion that "homophobia is prejudice against (fear or dislike of) homosexual people and homosexuality," and that it "describes hostility or fear of gay people and homosexuality. For example, someone might be called homophobic if they dislike gay people; or if someone is violent towards a gay person they could also be described as homophobic" (written student response). Other students took their definitions a step further, outlining language use as homophobic, recognizing that the language they used was potentially hurtful and inappropriate, or both. One youth suggested, "teenagers these days use words to express how bad something is, for example, this class is stupid, or this assignment is dumb, then 'that's so gay.' I even say it." This student understood that "that's so gay" was homophobic and the equating of "gay" with something he deemed negative or bad was not merely an innocent language substitution. He was articulating a realization that he didn't "actually think about how those simple words could affect people," and words that may have once seemed humorous and banal had a negative effect on others.

Another student engaged in the same written assignment, attempted to explain the vernacular excess of gay pejoratives in youths' vocabulary, arguing that:

> Homophobia is a term that is over-used. People feel the need to include this word in their everyday life it has become so over-used and that it's been brought into terms that aren't even alike to the word *gay*, *homo*, *fag*, etc. Some examples of these are: "That test was so gay!" "You're a fag!" "Your clothes look gay." These are some examples of a ridiculous term that has taken our vocabulary over, and is daily used, in like every single sentence. We have actually changed our words from "That test sucked ass" to "That test was so gay!"

The seemingly inherent contradiction of at once claiming the overuse of homophobia to describing the use of gay pejoratives, and the simultaneous acknowledgement of expressions such as "that's so gay" having become discursively universalized to describe all things deemed unpopular and disagreeable is, from a pedagogical standpoint, telling. The messages of antihomophobia, have, according to this young woman, come to mean very little in terms of addressing verbal slurs and abuse. This plainly spoken ambivalence speaks, at best, to the failure of current antihomophobic and antibullying discourses, and, at worst, to the marked absence of such discourses.

Not surprisingly, many studies of youth, sexuality, and gender have historically investigated gender in relation to binary understandings of masculinity and femininity (Connell 2000; Gonick 2003; Mac An Ghaill 1994; MacLeod 1995; Reed 1999; Thorne 1993) and/or (homo)sexual orientation as it relates to the schooling experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth and teachers (Due 1995; Griffin et al. 2004; Lund 2004; Rofes 1989; Savin-Williams 2005). Rarely do these studies engage the intersections of gender and sexuality, and even more uncommon still is the mention of heterosexual norms.

Warner (1993) defines heteronormativity as

> … the normalizing processes which support heterosexuality as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of inter-gender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist. (p. xxi)

Accordingly, discussions of heteronormativity include highlighting the existence of, and interrupting silent assumptions about, heterosexuality as normal and

homosexuality as "Other." Warner argues that heteronormativity is ubiquitous, thereby maintaining the power of heterosexuality as dominant and privileged—an assertion I would argue is particularly salient to the space of the classroom, and the systems of meaning that circulate in secondary school social and cultural arenas.

Within schools, the isolation of topics—or supplementation mode of inclusion, often incorporated under a rubric of social justice, with a day for queers, a day for people of colour, and so on—(re)constructs classroom knowledge in a way that fails to question how that knowledge is being constructed. Britzman (2000) argues that the mere insertion of sexuality reinforces the manner in which the "curriculum structures modes of behavior and orientations to knowledge that are repetitions of the underlying structure and dynamics of education: compliance, conformity and the myth that knowledge cures" (p. 35). As a result, add-and-stir models (Loutzenheiser 2003; MacIntosh 2007, 2013) do little to examine critically the content or confront the taken-for-granted information delivery of programs. Instead, students and teachers are left with pedagogies of inclusion and 'good intents.' Embedded in the logic of intent is a belief that education leads to 'understanding' and that understanding provides the impetus to cease and desist the engagement of homophobic behaviour (Loutzenheiser 2001). Accepting these concerns as valid begs the question of what might it look like to develop curricula and pedagogies that disrupt the heteronormativity of educative spaces. The silences, mimetic language and the identificatory negotiations revealed in many queer youth narratives confirm the need for a more nuanced understanding among educators of the complex spaces where homophobia and heterosexism intersect alongside the recursive demand for normalcy and complacency.

At one end of the antihomophobia educational spectrum is a rhetoric that fuels frustration and the desire for a renewed and queered politics, while at the other end this same rhetoric coupled with liberal ideas of tolerance and individualism breeds an unsettling complacency. This complacency was outlined by one OIS program facilitator, Philip, who noted:

> The gay community is coasting on achievements that have been done before, and now they see there are gay characters on TV, and gay marriage is legalized—so therefore our job is done, we can relax now. Whereas there is so much going on, still, when there two guys holding hands in public, their body language, people's body language … it's so harmful.

Complacency, then, is not an individualistic trait but collective—borne of the difficulty of inculcating change in neoliberal times. What is rewarded in schools is often that which does not require radical alterations of curricula and pedagogy. Complacency, "is the affect of homonormativity" (Duggan and Muñoz 2009, p. 280); it is a "politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them" (Duggan 2002, p. 179). To echo the participant above: how has complacency become endemic, mistaking recognizability for equity, and a queer body saturated with meaning for acceptance and legibility? This is not a complacency resting on the individual; rather a collective complacency systemically shored up and rewarded.

The demand for normalcy and assimilative demands of society, particularly in the adolescent years, reproduce oppressive narratives that can profoundly shape the connections between identity and literacy –conceived here as social text— particularly in relation to self and one's relationship to the wider social order. It is within the more nuanced and complex renderings of homophobia and heterosexism that the possibility opens for pedagogies and curricula that are constitutive of a knowledge production whose goal is not only to "defetishize and queer those dominant knowledges—reading the complex and open totality of relations out of which they emerge—but also to offer an alternative orientation … to make another sense, so that we have allies in the fight" (Crosby et al. 2011, p. 146). The desire, then, is for a knowledge that imbues its learners with the skill to navigate the complexities at stake in both educational and social engagements. This is a knowledge production that moves away from antihomophobia and its essentialized discussions of sexual subject positions and into an acceptance of sexual and gender diversity for what it is, without foreclosing its emergent and ever-mobilizing potential. Knowledge such as this enriches youths' ability to self-articulate and traverse the sociocultural landscapes of diversity and individuality, re-locating literacy as a means of pleasure and self-expression.

Youth perspectives of homophobia point to the ways in which its' messaging within educational spaces impacts the broad network of identificatory structuring. To which, I suggest that antihomophobia discourses, as part of this identificatory production, are problematic since their very focus on the individual queer body and individual action and reaction, as well as the assimilationist pull of the (homo) normative rhetorics in which they are anchored, further reifies the categorized difference and othering that its initiatives hope to erase. A result of these rhetorics is an isolating environment in which queer youth come to understand identity production and articulate meanings of self.

*Out In School'*s curricular offerings both echo and unsettle normative rhetorics of antihomophobia education by entering into the gaps and silences antihomophobia propagates in and through curriculum. They do so without the promise of educative resolution. And perhaps this is the lesson of the attempt to bridge the gap—the possibility of thinking through modes of educative address even as it "is not something that teachers can harness, control, predict or technologize" (Ellsworth 1997, p. 33). Thus, the point of this chapter is not to posit *OIS*, or other community based curricular alternatives as a magical remedy to antihomophobia education, nor is it to argue that youth films as cultural artifact circulate as queer or not queer; rather, it is to point out the complicity of the pedagogical in connection to queer youth and their critical and social literacies in relation to self and other.

Motivated in part by Stockton's (2009) repurposing of gay beyond its historically adult constructions and her specific interpretation of the gay child as unknowable, I ask what it means that children must fit themselves into an undeniably adult construction of gayness—the homosexual child, the gay child, the queer child, the questioning child. What does it mean for educators to have the spectre of the gay child haunting attempts to unravel and combat antihomophobia when the very pedagogies we employ rely upon the impossible constructions of the gay child?

What is the alternative to antihomophobia pedagogies established in a practice of reading the queer body across a host of peculiarized and highly coded spaces and through equally coded performances? What might this mean for how we think of critical literacies and media productions? Does Stockton's construction of the queer child help to account for post-queer constructions "unsettle and displace modernist assumptions of, and jubilant post-queer proclamations about, millennial youth" (Bryson and MacIntosh 2010, p. 102)? Is it post-queer when children begin to fit more closely the adult constructions of gayness based on adults' own experiences of homophobia, denial, desire, acceptance, and refusal?

## No Hate Film Boot Camp

The *No Hate* film boot camp is one example of the manifold and, at times, paradoxical pedagogical spaces that queer youth occupy—spaces that are steeped in both the assimilative discourses of antihomophobia and the disruptive discourses shaped to confront normativity. The bootcamp provides an avenue for thinking through and analysing of the pedagogical significance of youth-made film. Further, the bootcamp provides glimpses of the queerness that youth both wittingly and unwittingly project, a narrative trace offered in response to a culture and society that seeks to define them, a society whose social text ascribes meaning to identities that they themselves have not yet begun to fully access or articulate.

*No Hate* is a free annual film camp developed by *Out in Schools* (*OIS*). The camp is offered once a year during spring break or in the summer, depending on funding sources and the availability of those funds. The intensive five-day filmmaking workshop is open to up to 15 LGTBQ youth and their allied peers ages 14 through 24. Participants learn the basics of digital filmmaking, including hands-on training with project design, storyboarding, lighting and camera technique, script writing, sound and visual editing in a supportive and youth-focused environment. *OIS* partners with Reel Youth, a British Columbia–based not-for-profit media-empowerment program focused on social justice issues with the goal of supporting young people to create and distribute films about their visions for a better world, for the duration of the film camp.

All of the films created through *No Hate* are screened at the annual Vancouver Queer Film Festival and to students during *OIS* school-based facilitations across the province, and can be viewed as part of a public discourse about anti-homophobia. The films are also screened online at outinschools.com and on YouTube through both the Reel Youth and *OIS* YouTube channels. Two *No Hate* films have screened at international film festivals through connections with Reel Youth, who tour their own film festival internationally. The idea of film as a purposeful act of engagement—as an act of "doing"—is confirmed when one participant remarked, "I feel like with film you could do so much—there's so much you can do because it's basically telling a story." Observing the boot camp, it was evident that for many participants *No Hate* is a way for these young people to see themselves reflected as a

part of a community or communities. The notion of communities is of particular importance here because a number of the youth filmmakers identified as Asian, First Nations, or mixed race and discussed the multiple spaces they felt they occupied.

The data discussed and analysed below is taken from observations of 2 different bootcamps and interviews with: Gesus, 20-year old, bisexual and male identifying; Kylion, 13-year old, allied (meaning see themselves as an active Ally to queer communities), straight and female identifying; Little One, 12-year old, questioning and female identifying, Lady Gaga,18-year-old, gay and male identifying, Lita,15-year old straight and female identifying, and Margaret, 15-year old pansexual and female identified.[1]

With the goal of highlighting the significance of film production as a purposeful, new form of media engagement, I premise these analyses with an understanding that media and the lived social spaces of youth are fundamentally entwined. While media and popular culture have always had well-known appeal for youth in general (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003; Hebdige 1979; Jacobs 2005) the *OIS* bootcamp program is designed to appeal to a generation for whom DIY media production generates particular allure (Bugess and Green 2009; Livingstone and Helsper 2010). This allure, however, does not function isolated from social, political and cultural constructions. In Gibbons' (2010) work with marginalized youth and moving artifacts, she concludes that in creating film youth often "draw from a combination of media spaces, such as mainstream media" but they also are equally "influenced by their lived social spaces" (p. 11). In the case of queer and gender variant youth their lived social space includes the classroom and the socially and politically fraught space of the school. And yet, many youth (and perhaps educators) categorize media production as the encapsulated experience of "making film" and other artifacts or describe a media literacy that is perilously uncomplicated in its individualized discussion of literacy and literacy formation. As, youth film camp participant Gesus observes:

> Well, look at our generation. It's like people still watch movies and stuff to go to theatres and cause they want to see the big screen at times—but like, there's so many people who can make—we have the technology to make our own films now.

Gesus' assessment that his generation is "all virtual," speaks to the significance of youths' creative practices, and the ways in which their day-to-day lives are entwined with these practices. Gesus already believes that his voice, his film, has a place from which to speak. Beyond his imagined audience, however, it becomes a question of whether Gesus and his peers have the critical skills to develop the message and representative forms they wish to portray for their imagined audience. Responding to the millennial generation that Gesus identifies above, youth-based educational organizations try to appeal to youths' interest in media. The question then for Gesus and his peers becomes that of content as they script messages to the audience they have envisioned for their work.

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[1] A reminder that these identifiers were supplied by the youth on the day or days they were interviewed. They are not meant to solidify any identity, either for the reader or in their own minds. On a different day, those identifications may have changed.

## "My Film Will Change the World … or Something"

Youth offered multiple reasons for attending *No Hate*. Many of the participants stated that the emphasis on learning film techniques was key in their decision to apply. Both Gesus and Kylion indicated that filmmaking and media led them to the program; though both also indicated that the sociality and informal learning of the camp were part of what they desired out of the program itself. When asked what appealed to her in the program, Kylion responded "the filmmaking part," but then continued, "and, like, trying to change the world bit by bit I guess." Gesus similarly suggested that his decision hinged on learning film but also his desire to find a space to continue his coming-out processes. While a third participant, Lady Gaga, is attentive of the multiple roles film can play in his explanation for coming to camp and is clear in stating that he wants his work to have a purpose: "Um, I've always used film as a way for me to express myself…. I think my film would really create a good conversation all kids should have once in their lifetime." Not surprisingly, as Fleetwood (2005) notes, many organizations focus solely on media literacies and leverage digital technologies and the principles of media literacy to equip otherwise "underrepresented groups with the tools of media production" (p. 88). The question, then, becomes media literacies for what and whom, and to what end? Is it enough to hand youth, particularly marginalized youth, the tools of media production alone, or is there a questioning of media's social (sub)text and a fostering of criticality that is also necessary?

The youth also discussed what they learned and took away from the week. Not surprisingly many talked about the film skills they acquired. Lita, for example, noted that she learned "teamwork", "listening" but also "being more aware of the world today". Similarly, Margaret, discussing what she took away from the week, commented, "Yeah we didn't really hit too much upon antihomophobia like speeches and talks during this thing because it was all about the filmmaking process. So that part I didn't learn much about." Notably, she equates antihomophobia with "speeches and talks" and not with any activities that would suggest student engagement. What is interesting, here, is that Margaret highlights what she calls self-learning and disentangles this learning from the "whole antihomophobia thing." This could be read as a reliance on the discourses of individualism, one that demands a divorcing of oneself from the larger implications and complicities of homophobia.

With this in mind it is not surprising that, in observing the bootcamp, I also wondered about the split between process (film) and content (education) centered on antihomophobia. Overall, from a pedagogical perspective, there was very little weight on message and more emphasis on an outcome from a technical perspective. Central reference points did not change; gender and sexual norms were understood as anchoring, if free-floating benchmarks. It seems that without alternative reference points the youth, most of whom were marginalized, had few ways of disrupting norms without first reproducing them. Similarly, in Fleetwood's (2005) San Francisco area based research on marginalized youth as hyper-visualized and over-determined subjects of media, she found that "youth producers unanimously chose

statistics that framed youth as victims of violence, poverty, and oppression" (p. 92). How might we as educators, then, create an informed process to facilitate media production, one that educates critical media literacies but also works to develop literacy as a social text that provides sexual and gender marginalized youth with the tools necessary to refute widely circulated over- determined representations of themselves as other?

As Warner (2005) argues, heteronormativity is ubiquitous, maintaining the power of heterosexuality as dominant and privileged—an assertion that is particularly salient to the space of the classroom, and the systems of meaning that circulate in secondary school social and cultural arenas. I found this to especially be the case in a short intensive workshop. In the case of the film boot camp, there was a lack of discussion about the normative assumptions embedded in discourses about the queer body—the uncontested assemblages rooted in anti-homophobia education and that circulate wildly in popular media—and the uncritical analyses of other social texts.

The evidence of this is reflected back in what the youth chose to represent, their inability to articulate their own issues in relation to dominant heterosexual norms, and the disconnect that occurred between their expressed creative desires and the end product. Most of the films produced through *No Hate* belie the filmmakers' intentions, revealing a reliance on staid antihomophobia discourses that echo a neoliberal message of individualism. Notably, however, some of the youth created films that, while not undoing the project of staid identity politics, were able to push the notion of LGBT identity forward, complicating its tropes and binaries while still engaging the tensions intrinsic to standard pedagogical strategies and simplified notions of homophobia.

## Sense and Sensibilities: Neoliberalism in No Hate Films

> The youth filmmakers I've observed thus far, the film submissions I've watched, and some of the films used by OIS employ a neoliberal language of tolerance and assimilation. None of the films seem to question the dominant framework of heterosexuality; rather, they circulate rhetoric from the school context, a rhetoric commonly employed in educational realms. A rhetoric that is about producing the queer body for acceptance, rearticulating a queerness that embraces the notion of "fair play," a queerness that is about being a good citizen. (Field notes, April 9, 2009)

Attempts to offer an alternative to standard antihomophobia frameworks, such as those offered by *OIS* and *No Hate*, are prescriptively limited in their ability to deliver a queer or antiheteronormative pedagogy, a constraint directly related to the institutional and ideological parameters of existing educational social justice frames and discourses. It can be argued that neoliberal rhetorics of tolerance and belonging have long fueled antihomophobia discourses, its assimilative goals successfully impeding pedagogical reform (MacIntosh 2013).

Education's constant pedagogical orientation toward otherness (Kumashiro 2002) calls to mind what Edelman (1994) has identified as a liberationist politic in which "the homophobic insistence upon the social importance of codifying and registering sexual identities" (p. 4) is the educative order of the day. Many youth film producers I spoke with expressed a desire to complicate this codification by engaging inveterate discourses of othering, belonging, and tolerance while simultaneously attempting to upend more common stereotypical offerings of the gay body. However, their attempts to complicate the discourses engaged the very norms and stereotypes they were endeavoring to disrupt.

When Little One was asked what she hoped her film would do, she said: "Uh, I think make it better … make it interesting and then have people see it and be like— you do not always have to make a film that's like, oh, it's bad when there's homophobia. You do not always have to show homophobia in an antihomophobia PSA [public service announcement]; you could just show people who are happy." Echoing those queer theorists who desire an alternative to current articulations and theorizations, including neoliberal rhetorics of victimhood (MacIntosh 2007; Swearer et al. 2010; Thurlow 2001; Walton 2004), this young filmmaker struggles to articulate her desire to produce a positive film, a film absent of the stereotypical images of negativity that she associates with antihomophobia. Her desire is to "show people who are happy," to break away from the at-risk discourses and pathologizing that saturate antihomophobia initiatives and continue to inform public discourse and the social text of the queer body.

The *No Hate* produced film *l(i)ebe* offers an example of contradictory desires and outcomes. The filmmakers, four in total, three allied, heterosexual and female identifying and one questioning female identifying, began the filmmaking process with what they articulated as a desire to disrupt the heterosexual-is-good, gay-is-bad binary. Yet, despite their stated desire, the filmmakers ended up reproducing a standard assimilationist discourse of 'don't hate me because I'm different', which is so often a part of antihomophobia and antibullying messaging. This reproduction is not uncommon and, as Soep (2006) and Sefton-Green et al. (2009) have cautioned, the productions derived from literacies—particularly multi-modal literacies—cannot be assumed to be automatically critical as young people can and do "reproduce gendered and racialized stereotypes, and mimic the most problematic or at least uninspired formulas within mainstream commercial media, in their own graphics, videos, or websites created through media education classes and programs" (Soep 2006, p. 200).

The film, *l(i)ebe,* begins with the young female characters, all hand puppets, bantering about makeup, when one of the characters suggests they "should totally share their biggest secrets ever;" this results in disclosures about fake nails, and the absence of eyeliner. Suddenly one of the characters reveals she is gay, followed by characters confession of the same, then another, and another. The fourth and final character, in what can only be interpreted as an attempt to unsettle the normativism of the heterosexual–gay dichotomy, reveals that although she "is not" (gay) she will "still accept you all." At this point the short film segues into a gummy-bear

dance in celebration of gay marriage. The young filmmakers' production echoes antihomophobia messaging and pedagogies that they have witnessed, discourses that fail to provide them with the identificatory tools necessary to produce a film that reflects Little One's belief (discussed above) that "… You don't always have to show homophobia in antihomophobia PSA; you could just show people who are happy." Little One and her group were pleased with the film in its final cut, and they discussed the tone as being "right."

While I am not offering her understanding here as one of false consciousness, I would argue that the film's content is indicative of a limitation of the discourses offered to her and her group as part of the educative and public discourses regarding (anti)homophobia, and media literacies. The reifying and assimilationist discourses available to these and other youths not only fail to advance their understanding of the complexities and connections of normative ideology, but legitimates "sanctioned learning outcomes" while simultaneously falling short of developing media literacy that is "centered on voice [and] leverages the power of self-expression" (Soep 2006, p. 200).

Similarly, in *Spence Makes Sense*, a film made the following year at the 2010 *No Hate* film camp, the young filmmakers, all of whom identify as gay, try to dislocate the heterosexual–gay binary by disrupting the coming-out narrative. The six-minute short parodies the struggle of Spence, a young man coming to terms with his orientation as heterosexual. The film effectively mimics the stereotypes of the gay male body, with effeminate tropes of pink T-shirts, glitter, and feather boas. Mocked and teased by his friends for his "masculinity," when the young man finally musters up the courage to come out to his two gay dads as heterosexual, they are shocked but supportive, and the young man gives his symbolic feather boa to his father, stating "it looks better on you anyways." While somewhat more complex than its 2009 predecessor *l(i)ebe,* the parodic narrative of *Spence Makes Sense* and its correspondingly mimetic visual elements fall short in rupturing the binaries and stereotypes because, like the 2009 film, the filmmakers here lack the integrated critical counternarrative tools needed to develop their message, and consequently are unable to cohesively link the elements of their media, as bodies-made-other circulate through the film in an attempt to disrupt. Though certainly the film draws attention to the fact that "coming out," is clearly not an heterosexual storyline, it does so by reifying the gay bodies and the stereotypes that mark them as such (Rogers et al. 2010).

While the lack of language available to youth to articulate their desire for spaces of difference points to an obvious and more general gap in curricular approaches, and therefore not surprisingly at the boot camp, the persistence of the desire itself is hopeful. As Butler (1993, 2004) pointed out almost two decades ago, dominant systems are never stable. Youths' film productions, their expressed forms of aesthetic refusal, and peer-to-peer exchanges such as that of the young filmmakers in this research, make viable a space for alternative social texts, even as their attempts fall short and available discourses fail them.

## Visual Cues

There is a certain queer resonance in the films as these marginalized youth endeavor to represent their interpretations of themselves and others. The notion of thwarting the prescribed narratives of heteronormative development, of creating a nonlinear space that manifests queerness without the direct or even conscious refusal of the predicated identificatory labels of childhood, is useful in thinking through how young people become self-identified queer youth and the formal and informal texts that inform this becoming. If what occurs in educative spaces is thought of as multimodal and critical literacies, although the meanings of this term have been largely over used and under-defined, how might educators think about turning an informed eye to the social texts that are written and upon, and reified by heteronormative assumptions about, the queer body.

The idea that youth are free agents who can and ought to define and or reinvent themselves at any given moment signals a liberal demand for certainty in the guise of free choice and individualism, a contradiction that permeates any iteration of the individual as intelligible subject. Which is why, in part, youths' narrative and filmic accounts express both assimilative and non-normative discourses.

The result is a series of visual clues, codes that hint at the possibility of queerness. Dyer (1993) describes the signifiers of "gayness," something he calls gay typification, as a "repertoire of gestures, expressions, stances, clothing, and even environments that bespeak gayness" (p. 2). He further argues that such a catalogue of signs, "making visible the invisible, is the basis of any representation of gay people involving visual recognition, the requirement of recognizability in turn entailing that of typicality" (p. 19). Similarly, DeVaney (2002) argues that "codes develop only through repetition, and readers of printed or visual texts tacitly understand the meaning of codes often before they can verbalize that meaning" (p. 320). If we hold to Stockton's supposition, that queer, lesbian, gay, etc. are labels assigned prematurely to youth in anticipation of a sexual narrative, then youth can only approximate adult representations of queerness, which they cannot occupy or possess fully, given that LGBT identities are always already over-determined by adult characterizations of *queer*, *LGBT*, *gay*, et cetera. Unfortunately most pedagogical models within the formal curriculum are not conducive to enriching youths' interpretive frameworks in ways that enable them to challenge, complexify, or reinvent codes and stereotypes of the status quo. Rather, as Broughton (2008) observes, "normative schooling is a kind of nontransferable meta-learning that works to restrict the capacity to learn how to learning new ways" (p. 36). Thus most youth filmmakers I observed, despite their exposure to film and other forms of media, and their desire to upset the static trajectories of antihomophobia, lacked the multimodal, complex and contradictory literacies necessary to work through their identificatory engagements and desires on film. I am not suggesting that "good" media/critical literacy would "solve" the problem. Rather, I am arguing that the very interrogation of existing literacies and social texts would provoke different pedagogical possibilities.

## Youth Filmmakers and Queer Spaces

Despite the analysis herein, which ultimately concludes that several of the *No Hate* films reproduce discourses of normativism—particularly in the dialogue of the film—queerness, or the possibility of an alternative social text regarding the queer body and youths social production still resonates in their work. We see glimpses in the moments where the youth begin to read their interpretations of queerness itself, be it biographical or a fiction written into the characters of their filmmaking. Taken together, the image, desired message, and filmic dialogue are telling in their failure to produce queerness but equally telling in their successful slippage. The youth filmmakers are attempting to represent, in Stockton's terms, the impossibility of their queerness and its clear articulation. The youth filmmakers cannot help but employ these normative discourses in their films because it is the language, the identificatory toolset, which they have been offered and steeped within. Despite these limitations, the youth persist in their articulations, persist in their desire to be queer and perform their queerness as refusal.

To be clear, I am not making the argument that the youth production is inherently queer; it is often both queer, and not, simultaneously. Several of the youth filmmakers that I spoke with in the course of this study articulated a desire to produce media representative of something other than the stereotypes of queer youth. For example, many youth expressed a desire to produce films that would educate adults, in particular, about difference. They aspired to visually upset the parameters of gender and sexual performance in an attempt to articulate the social and cultural spaces beyond the heterosexually familiar. Their ambitions speak to the ways in which they are already engaged in critical literacy practices and in the leveraging of media as social text.

## Problematizing Queer: Some Concluding Thoughts

In agreement with youths desire to complicate and rethink both informal and formal knowledge production about the queer body, I want to suggest that that queer is both a useful and problematic framework. As Berlant and Warner (1995) prophetically cautioned more than a decade ago,

> The danger of the label *queer theory* is that it makes its queer and nonqueer audiences forget these differences and imagine a context (theory) in which *queer* has a stable referential content and pragmatic force…. Part of the point of using the word *queer* in the first place was the wrenching sense of recontextualization it gave. (p. 345)

Here, Berlant is worrying about that which has come to pass: that is, that queer would become an umbrella term that acts as a stable identifier of an identity that can be discussed as denoting "queer is *x*" rather than "queer is *x* in this moment, but it does not and cannot signal the stability or reification of *x* in this moment

or any other moment." Within the context of the queer body, the diminishment of queer's "wrenching" recontexualizing ability (Berlant and Warner 1995) is marked by a normative politics that consistently advances the primacy of individualism, constructing queer bodies both as knowable, and wounded, as is the case in antihomophobia education. As I have argued elsewhere (MacIntosh 2004, 2007), heterosexual privilege and the ongoing heteronormitivization of education and curriculum is an invisible, pervasive, and politically paralyzing form of oppression, one that plays out all too clearly in youth film production.

It is not surprising, given the complex and politically fraught history of *queer* and its politics, that one of the challenges of this research has been the positioning of "queerness" as a resource to advance critical literacy and the importance of peer-to-peer exchange. That is, of attempting to work through an excavation of the moments of queerness within the research itself and within youth film production, without uncritically reproducing the problematic and mainstream educative discourses against which this work pushes. The theorizing of "ephemera" is Muñoz's (1996) response to the concern that queer acts are under erasure in public spaces, "through negation, through a process of erasure that redoubles and masks the systemic erasure of minoritarian histories" (p. 6). Queer acts, however momentary, must be unearthed, Muñoz argues, as they "stand as evidence of queer lives, powers and possibilities" (p. 6). Because of the dangers and injustices of queer lives, queerness often exists at the level of "innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments … while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility" (p. 6). These fleeting moments of possibility, the "ephemera as evidence" is what I have witnessed and seek to unearth as queerness in the youth-produced films examined herein. Ephemeral queerness, Muñoz suggests,

> is nothing like a smooth linkage … Ephemera, as I am using it here, is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance: it is all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. (p. 10)

Many of the films produced by youth through *OIS*, while at times embodying a normative logic of assimilation and a prevalent desire for homonormative acceptance, explore a kind of aesthetic dissidence that emanates an (ir)refutable queerness as social text. These peer-to-peer youth exchanges and narrative renderings are in fact, imperfect exemplars of "performances with powerful worldmaking capabilities" (p. 11).

A re-envisioning of education, traced through the work of alternative pedagogies, critical literacies, and youth media production is not a glorification of youth cultural production as a force of resistance (Best and Kellner 2003). It proposes a new scene of critical engagement and critical literacies for both the producers and the consumers of youth media. Acknowledging as Duggan (2009) does, that "there is fear attached to hope—hope understood as a risky reaching out for something else that *will* fail, in some if not all ways" (p. 279), we are faced with the fact that to do nothing is to embrace a kind of political complacency—"a form of happiness that will not risk the consequences of its own suppressed hostility and pain" (p. 280). The youth of this research are not complacent, nor are they defiant; they are, as

previously stated, quite simply, yet powerfully, persistent. The persistence of queer possibility, specifically that enacted through youth media engagement and film *production*, and the precariousness of that persistence is worthy of acknowledgement.

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# Chapter 6
# Digital Media and the Knowledge-Producing Practices of Young People in the Age of AIDS

**Claudia Mitchell**

## Introduction

Millions of young people around the world are using digital technologies and social media to produce, share, and comment on videos, photos, podcasts and other text streams. Even youth who do not have direct access to the Internet have a growing number of ways of sharing information and interacting through, for example, text messaging and crowdmapping as part of their do-it-yourself or (DIY) activities. (See Bloustien 2003, 2007; Banaji and Buckingham 2013; Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994; Carrington and Robinson 2009; De Castell and Jenson 2003; Heinzelman et al. 2011; Livingstone 2009; Levine 2011; Mallan 2009; Mallan et al. 2010; Mitchell and Murray 2012; Poletti 2008).

Alongside these youth-initiated DIY activities are a vast range of youth-focused initiatives organized as digital interventions by those working *with* youth. These interventions are typically part of participatory and community-based research with young people, drawing on photo-voice, participatory video, mobile phones, map-making, and digital storytelling, as tools of both research and engagement (See Clacherty 2005, 2010; Malone 2008; Moletsane et al. 2008; Mitchell 2009; Mitchell et al. 2010b; Mitchell 2011a; Mitchell 2011b; Stuart 2010; Stuart and Mitchell in-press). What the digital provides is an unprecedented efficiency for producing and distributing content, but it also provides opportunities to aggregate and study content less obtrusively. Overall, the sheer volume of data being produced through these two platforms, DIY practices and digital interventions should be a compelling reason for researchers to find ways of tapping into what young people are saying about their own lives and concerns, and also finding ways of directing the findings into policy dialogue.

My focus here is on how new literacies and especially young people's digital practices can (and must) inform programs and policies related to youth sexuality and HIV&AIDS. I offer this as a challenge and not with a set of pat answers. For

C. Mitchell (✉)
McGill University, Montreal, Canada
e-mail: claudia.mitchell@mcgill.ca

more than a decade I have been working with youth in a variety of community-based projects in Southern and Eastern Africa which are meant to respond to a "sick of AIDS" phenomenon (Mitchell and Smith 2003), and which are organized around various digital media and arts-based methods, ranging from participatory video, photography (photo-voice), drawing, cellphilms (videos made with a cellphone) blogging, and digital archiving. Not every component of these youth-focused projects has been 'youth only'. In rural KwaZulu-Natal, for example, this work has also included teachers (both preservice and inservice), community health care workers and parents, with the idea that community members can only be assets to each other when there are pedagogical spaces that recognize that 'every voice counts' in knowledge production (De Lange et al. 2010). What has cut across all of this work has been the recognition that unless young people are given a more significant voice in participating in dialogue about their own well-being, programs are doomed to fail (See Ford et al. 2003). The notion of youth as producers or co-producers of the solutions has been key, and so Colin Lankshear and Michele Knoebel's term 'youth as knowledge producers' (Lankshear and Knobel 2003) has been particularly useful in framing this participatory approach to working with youth. At the same time, other formulations such as David Gauntlett's idea of 'critical making' (Gauntlett 2006, 2011), Henry Jenkins' term 'participatory cultures' (Jenkins 2006) and David Buckingham and Julian Sefton-Green's 'youth as cultural producers' (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 1994) also highlight the potential of digital media for providing a generative 'knowledge-producing' space.

In these various formulations, knowledge is itself a contested term and gives rise to many questions, ranging from the issue of what counts as knowledge in relation to addressing HIV&AIDS, to questions of knowledge circulation and dissemination (and to whom?), and to question the type of tools that might be used to contribute to a 'build up' of knowledge in a community. Many of these questions speak to issues of 'getting the word out' which, in itself is often a contested construct/concept when it comes to research and what can disseminated, where and to whom? But there is an even more basic question, and that is one that asks what the responsibility of researchers should be in working with young people and their digital media practices? How can auto-ethnographic practices such as those discussed by Caroline Ellis (2004, 2009), or the reflexivity work of Burawoy (2003) contribute to deepening an understanding of 'youth as knowledge producers'? In order to shed light on these questions, I have organized the chapter very simply as 'looking in' on knowledge production, 'looking back' in relation to digital media, youth and sexuality, and 'looking forward' when addressing critical issues of knowledge production in the context of addressing sexuality and HIV&AIDS.

## Looking in: Close Encounters with Knowledge and Knowledge Production

In a chapter on knowledge production, it seems that there should be some idea of what is meant by knowledge or by theories of knowledge production. However, I have not taken a direct route through Foucault, for example, or other theorists, but offer some of my own auto-ethnographic encounters with knowledge and knowledge production. The three reflections that follow highlight some of the personal and academic dilemmas related to knowledge production.

### *Reflection 1: Whose Knowledge?*

I am in an information session sponsored by a national funding agency in the area of health, aimed at helping researchers to understand better how to frame our grant proposals. I listen carefully and pay close attention to the power point slides and learn about the various strategies for 'getting knowledge out there' and even for getting evidence on the impact of getting the knowledge out there. 'Knowledge management', 'knowledge transfer', 'knowledge mobilization'—these are the terms that are associated with the evidence-based knowledge-industry in health research, development studies and management studies, to only name a couple of the key areas where the word knowledge regularly appears. I keep waiting for the presenter to touch on the term 'knowledge producers' (or even knowledge production). Where does knowledge come from anyway? It isn't that that the presenter ignores knowledge production totally—but it seemed to me that it is taken as a given that the knowledge that is being disseminated is coming from the work of the researchers and not from the community. While there is nothing that the presenter says that rules out the possibility that the knowledge being disseminated could come from 14 year old girls and through their use of digital media, the participatory work that the presenter is speaking about in relation to knowledge transfer is more about how to get communities to 'buy in' to knowledge from somewhere else (Mitchell, field notes, March 2010).

### *Reflection 2: "We Wanted Other People to Learn from Us"*

My research colleagues and I are not quite sure what is going to happen in a blogging project that we start up in one of the rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal. None of the learners even have an email address, so just getting the blogs set up is complicated. And the computer skills of the group are not that well developed. The computer lab at their school seems to be barely functional. The learners are keen, though, and they are excited to be working with some photo images related to stigma and HIV&AIDS that have been produced in a photo-voice project by a class just a few

years ahead of them. They work with these images, coming up with their own captions and reflections. By the end of the weekend blogging workshop, they can't wait to continue with developing their blogs. But it is the 'bombshell' statement uttered by one of the participants, Thandi that continues to haunt me: after explaining in a focus group about what she had learned in the project about blogging, she goes on to say that the best part of blogging is this: "*we wanted other people to learn from us*". It feels like a wonderful disruption of the agendas of health and education that seek to bring knowledge and information to communities (See also Mitchell et al. 2010a).

## *Reflection 3: Knowledge, Knowledge Everywhere!*

When I start reviewing the *HIV&AIDS Draft Integrated Strategy of the Basic Education Department in South Africa* (2011), I am not really looking to do a discourse analysis on 'knowledge'. But once I get reading the document, the word knowledge and all its manifestations seem to jump out at me and I immediately think of Paula Morgan and Valerie Youssef's (2006) book *Writing rage: Unmasking violence through Caribbean discourse*. Here I offer one paragraph (emphasis added): "*Knowledge* of HIV and AIDS, including HIV prevention, does not appear to be connected to increased adoption of HIV prevention practices amongst people who test negative, but has been linked to increased prevention behaviours amongst those who test positive. There is now widespread recognition that a rational approach based on the assumption that new *knowledge* would lead to new behaviours is not a useful one. Alongside new *knowledge* (provided by teachers taught through the curriculum) is a range of life skills, attitudes and resiliences … Acknowledging this does not, however, diminish the role and importance of *knowledge* as an intermediate factor to bring about behaviour change" (np). Then there are other common uses of knowledge used in the text: "*knowledge* of one's status" and KAP studies (*Knowledge*, Attitudes and Practices) in relation to HIV&AIDS. The multiple ways in which the term knowledge is used in the document highlights the trickiness of knowledge and knowledge production. No wonder knowledge is so elusive. I can't help but wonder anew what the presenter talking about knowledge transmission, mobilization and management really meant.

## Looking Back

### *Two Days in March*

The 'looking back' of this chapter takes as its launching point two days in March, 2006 when my colleagues and I work at two rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, in order to carry out participatory video-making as a digital intervention.

At the end of each of the day-long events which involved young people, teachers, community health care workers and parents, everyone working in a small group had produced a short film of 3 or 4 min. The topics they chose to represent in the ten 3–5 min short films, all framed by an 'in my life' prompt, offered a fascinating array of 'takes' on what participants saw as important, and also paved the way for many different types of follow-up activities in the two communities. We have written extensively about this work elsewhere and in academic contexts in relation to process (Mitchell and De Lange 2011; Weber and Mitchell 2007). The thematic areas addressed in the videos include: poverty (Moletsane et al. 2009); barriers to schooling and the responsibilities of teachers (Mitchell et al. 2009); and gender based violence (Weber and Mitchell 2007), and have led us to also write about ethical considerations (Moletsane et al.; Mitchell 2011b), and audiences and sustainability (De Lange and Mitchell 2008). Interestingly the topic chosen by five out of six of the groups of young people across the two schools was gender violence, represented through such titles as "Trust No One At School", "Rape", "Raping and HIV and AIDS" and "Stop Sexual Abuse". Given that most of the youth participants in their small groups (and independent of what other groups were working on) produced videos on sexuality and gender-based violence, there is a particular knowing in action in the community. Indeed, as presented in two composite videos, *Our Stories* and *Seeing for Ourselves* (See also De Lange and Mitchell 2012a; Mitchell 2011a), the actual treatment and location of gender violence is diverse: at home when a father rapes his daughter; teachers as perpetrators; date and gang rape; and on the street (a girl is raped on her way to school). The genres, too, varied, from interviews (following a talk show genre), to melodrama (with 8 scene changes in one short narrative), through to a type of public service genre which included social messages such as "Stop Women Abuse", "Forward with Legal Rights", "Let Justice Be Done and Know Your Rights", and "To Report Rape Issues You can Contact 0800 55555".

The focus of their productions should not be surprising. In the perception of many people, South Africa continues to be regarded as the rape capital of the world in a context where high levels of violence are associated with gender inequality. The situation is paradoxical in that 'at least on paper' South Africa has a constitution which enshrines gender equality, and nationally, has put into place the gender machinery that should make a difference: the office of the Status of Women, gender focal persons across ministries, a Gender Commission, a Human Rights Commission and now a National Council to Address Gender Based Violence. To date there have been many studies that have attempted to address the issues, especially in relation to the lives of school-going girls, but as a careful analysis of these document reveals (Moletsane et al. 2010), there has been little progress since the Human Rights Watch *Scared at School* report (2001). Indeed, the situation has been exacerbated in relation to the gendered face of HIV&AIDS. While the country has made huge strides in enrolling girls in primary education specifically, but with high gender parity indexes at all levels, the sustained participation of girls in the education system, and in particular the poor quality of their educational experience remains as an area requiring investigation. One of the most pervasive reasons for the poor participation and low success of girls in the schooling system is gender inequality,

and in particular, its manifestations in violence against girls and women, and the consequent developmental problems including health (most notably HIV infections and reproductive health).

While the video productions were created in 2006, now eight years later the situation of gender violence in South Africa seems to have worsened and so the place of this work, and especially the role of youth as knowledge producers, seems even more critical particularly in relation to gender and HIV&AIDS. Globally, young people aged 15–24 make up 42 % of new HIV infections in people aged 15 and older, with the majority of these infections in 2010 among young people in sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS 2012). While the most recent statistics on HIV rates amongst youth show that infection rates are dropping in 16 of the hardest hit countries, including South Africa, a number of rural districts in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo continue to report high rates of infection especially amongst girls and young women. (See for example Abdool Karim and Abdool Karim 2010).

## *"What Will We Know when We Know It?"*

Ursula Franklin's (2002) critical question 'what will we know when we know it?' seems particularly relevant here. What are young people telling or conveying in their digital productions? How do we as researchers understand this work as knowledge production? Finally, as adults what do we do in relation to these knowledge-producing texts? While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a close reading of all of the productions, and indeed, as noted above, the research team has written extensively about different aspects of the videos, what I want to highlight here are some of the ways in which the productions speak to the contradictions and tensions in how young people are seeing gender violence in their everyday lives, in relation to (1) reporting and legal frameworks; (2) betrayal by adults in their lives (teachers, parents and community members).

### Reporting Gender Based Violence and Legal Frameworks

The Zuma government in South Africa has recently declared the most massive campaign in the history of the country to address the issue of rape. South Africa has one of the highest rates of sexual assaults in the world. As part of this strategy it also establishing a National Committee on Addressing Gender-Based Violence. The absolute numbers related to sexual violence are unreliable, however, because of under-reporting. Adolescent girls between the ages of 12 and 17 are particularly at risk. As Banwari (2011) notes, in 2000, of the over 52,550 cases of rape or attempted rape of girls and women reported to the South African Police Service, 21,438 were under the age of 18 years (with 7898 of these under 12 years). Confounding the under-reporting of sexual assault is the fact that rates of prosecution are low, with a 2005 study indicating that fewer than 1 % of cases actually result in a conviction, a

point that suggests that the often cited statistic "before her 18th birthday one in three South Africa girls will be sexually assault" (ANC Women's Caucus 1998). What is so disturbing is that fact that the videos produced by the youth shows a confidence, albeit mistaken, in the legal system in that the majority of the narratives dealing with sexual violence ended in a conviction.

In the case of one of the videos produced by the youth, *Vikea Abantwana* (or Protect the children—A story about incest), Phindelini is raped by her father. Eventually this is reported to the medical authorities and police and he is put in jail. In the final scene of the video we see him imploring his wife to help him get out of jail. In another video, *Rape*, the female character is raped by her boyfriend. She reports this to the police and in the last scene of the video we see him behind bars. He appears to show some remorse for what he has done, although not because of the impact of his actions on his girlfriend so much as what has happened to him in prison, where he himself is subjected to sexual violence.

> Ei! I am now regretful. I raped my sweetheart. When I get out of here she will not even want to see me. Ei, I raped a person really. I am in prison now. It's tough… even to eat. It is me that is getting raped now. They mount me. Ei, now I regret what I did. I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do. I am in prison now. I raped a female person. I raped her and beat her and am in prison now. I don't know what to do now. The men in here mount me and beat me. Just look now, when I get out of here the babes in the location will leave me. I won't get another cherry because I am known to be a rapist now. But you, my brothers out there, I'm telling you, restrain yourselves, be strong, don't rape females because you will be sentenced and grow old inside (prison).

## Betrayal by Adults

At the same time that the youth participants seem to believe in the legal system, their videos highlight the ways in which they feel betrayed by the adults in their everyday lives. As I describe elsewhere (Mitchell, 20l1b), *Vikea Abantwana* tells the story of Philendelini, who is found crying in the classroom by her best friend. As she reveals her story, we learn that she has been raped by her father. We also learn that she had tried to tell the various women in her community, but no one is willing to pass the information on to her mother. Eventually, she is taken to a doctor who confirms that the girl has been raped and also that she is pregnant. When the mother hears this, she bursts into tears, and the story ends with Philendelini's father behind bars in a jail. The video draws attention to the ways in which adult women, who are part of the lives of such girls, condone through their silence, acts of incest, and in doing so become part of the problem when dealing with family violence perpetrated on girls in South Africa. Even though Philendelini confides in the housekeeper, the housekeeper feels that she cannot directly confront her boss (Philendelini's mother), and so she passes the information on to a neighbor whom she hopes will then inform her boss, the mother. It is also interesting to note the initial denial on the part of the mother in the video. There is also something alarming about the ways in which the various women in Philendelini's life wonder who else she has told. It is as though they think that she should keep the information to herself, a point that is, of course,

also reinforced by the father who notes that this is something that should be kept in the family (Moletsane et al. 2008, p. 55). Through the voices of the various girls and women represented in the video there is also the idea that what has happened to Philendelini is not really true. One of the clear messages about the story the girls tell through this medium is that they feel that adults do not listen to them when they report rape and other acts of sexual violence. And although Philendilini has tried to tell so many of the women around her who should care about her welfare, she has in fact been let down by them, as they take no action on her behalf.

In *Trust No One at Schoo*l, a male teacher rapes a female student. The video was produced by a group made up of three boys and three girls. It uses a melodramatic style to draw attention to the behaviour of male teachers. The specific issue relates to keeping girls in after class, ostensibly to help them with homework, but instead subjecting them to sexual violence in a deserted school. As noted in the previous section, it is an issue that has been raised in numerous reports including the *Scared at School* report of Human Rights Watch. The film is shot entirely in and around a classroom, and in the opening classroom scene it is obvious that there is 'something' between the teacher and one of the girls. The girl is asked by the teacher to stay after class, and behind a closed door we hear only the screams of the girl as she is being raped by the teacher. Powerfully and dramatically the camera lingers on the closed door. It is what the audience cannot see but can only imagine that gives the final scene its dramatic and chilling impact. It is quite a sophisticated concept, and although none of the participants would probably have seen the Charlise Theron film *North Country*, there is a similar after-school scene where a teacher detains a girl and rapes her behind closed doors. The teacher warns the girl to tell no one. As is highlighted in the book *Combating gender violence in and around schools* (Leach and Mitchell 2006), schools should be 'safe havens' for male and female students. The male teacher in this film then betrays the trust of his students and is clearly breaching all Codes of Conduct. However, unlike the other videos that suggest that there are (or should be) legal consequences, in the case of the teacher, he gets away with the assault. This also gives a sense of what students do not know in relation to their rights at school.

In reviewing the 'knowing' as presented by the young film-makers, I am struck by the clear messages that are presented. The actual visual representations are offered in very direct ways. There can be no mistake about who the perpetrators are and who the victims are. But what do adult researchers do with this knowledge? Is there a responsibility solely to make sure that all ethical procedures are followed in terms of anonymity and confidentiality in this research, or is there also a responsibility to take the issues to another level? For example, if most young people think that reporting gender violence is straightforward (although it is not), what are teachers and researchers doing to make sure that young people actually know what procedures to follow? How can the process be improved? What can be done to make sure that young people and their teachers know about Codes of Conduct?

## Looking Forward: The Cumulative Cultural Text of Knowledge Related to Sexuality and HIV&AIDS

A number of years ago my colleagues and I coined the term "cumulative cultural text" and used it in a variety of contexts to name the build-up over time of cultural constructions, particularly through media: teachers and teaching in relation to popular culture, literature, memories and popular lore (see Weber and Mitchell 1995, p. 7); and socio-cultural constructs of girlhood as read through such cultural texts as Barbie and Nancy Drew (see Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 1995). In that work, we drew on Fiske's (1987) ideas on textuality, and the ways in which readings of the primary text (the actual television episode or film), and the secondary texts (the audience texts and the producer texts) leak into and inform each other. More recently Yang (2013) in her work with Fiske's ideas applied to participatory video has conceived of an additional layer of textuality, the researcher text that highlights the role of the researcher's reflexivity. By this she is referring to the ways in which we as researchers, our perceptions and biases, are also central a critical component in the overall interpretive process of working with participatory video. Given the body of work on sexuality and HIV&AIDS that is being produced by young people through digital media, how can researchers contribute to helping to study the cumulative cultural texts of sexual violence by supporting the development of a community knowledge base coming out of the various youth-based participatory initiatives at community level? The digital images (photos, videos, drawings) produced by young people can be regarded as cultural artefacts that carry important community knowledge. Beyond producing composite videos (such as *Our Stories* and *Seeing for Ourselves*) the next step in the type of work that we have been doing with participatory video is to ensure that the visual artifacts (for example, the composite videos and individual videos) are in a digital archive for future use. We believe that a digital archive is important, as it helps to extend the life of the participatory video and other visual artefacts produced, and in so doing contributes to an afterlife for research experiences. As we have found in other work with digital archives, particularly in the context of working with photographs (De Lange and Mitchell 2012a), a digital archive can be an important dissemination platform, enabling communities to access their own artifacts so they can work with a wider audience and thus create a space for reflection and further discussion of such critical issues as poverty, gender-based violence and HIV&AIDS. In a context of asset-based work in communities where communities might work 'from the inside' with their own assets, it is key that the knowledge that is being produced in the community through participatory video can be used by the community. At the same time, is it sufficient for the knowledge produced by youth to stay in the community? If the adults in the community (teachers, community members, parents, police) are not using the information and knowledge to which they have access to protect children and young people, should there not be wider audiences for policy dialogue?

## Conclusion

Often, as Low et al. (2012) highlight, much of the work on youth and digital media, especially in relation to participatory video. ends up in a celebratory mode. In going beyond the celebratory mode, as is highlighted in the *Handbook on Participatory Video* (Milne et al. 2012), there is now increasing attention to critical perspectives on the various stages of the process, on power and ethics and indeed on how participatory the work actually is. However what I have tried to show here is that we need to go even further to look at the content of what is being produced, and to consider what its role might be in relation to knowledge production and contributing to new knowledge. While I have focused here on work that comes out of various digital interventions, clearly youth DIY media work can be similarly rich and knowledge-producing, especially in the context of the widespread access to cellphone technology. In reflecting on the new knowledge contained in the video productions described above, I have identified two key areas—one related to misinformation that young people currently have about reporting and legal frameworks related to gender violence, and one related to the ways that adults in the community are betraying young people. Neither of these issues has received very much attention in the academic literature on sexuality and HIV&AIDS, and neither has surfaced in the knowledge management literature. If we are to take seriously, then, the idea of youth as knowledge producers, we as a community of researchers, teachers and others who work with youth and digital media, have a challenge in front of us to make sure that media-making that gets translated into knowledge can also get translated into action. This is not to leave out the possibilities for young people themselves to take action, or to suggest that digital media productions have an all-purpose use, but only that there are also responsibilities on the part of researchers. It is not then just a question of 'what will we know when we know it?' but what will we do about it?

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# Chapter 7
# Youth Literacies in Kenya and Canada: Lessons Learned from a Global Learning Network Project

**Maureen Kendrick, Margaret Early and Walter Chemjor**

Synonymous with the twenty-first Century are new literacy practices that require the ability to "read" and "write" complex multimodal texts comprised of images, gestures, movements, music, speech, and writing across print and digital media (Kress 2000, 2003; Street 2012). With these new literacies come an increased recognition that there is a qualitative difference in how we communicate through visual, audio, spatial, and linguistic modalities (Kress 2000, 2003; New London Group 2000; Stein 2008), and that these modalities are combined in complex ways to make meaning (Jewitt and Kress 2003; Snyder 2001). These new practices have also expanded conceptions of literacy and what it means to be literate (Gregory 1994, 1998; Heath 1983; Lankshear and Knobel 2003; Street 1984). Consequently, there is considerable interest in establishing global learning networks that will enhance learners' engagement with new literacies (Cummins et al. 2006; Lotherington 2007; Prinsloo 2005). By "global learning networks" we refer to the practices in which students and teachers use technology as an integral part of a learning exchange over long distances (Cummins et al. 2006).

In 2010, we were part of a team of three researchers at the University of British Columbia who were awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant to explore how English Language Learners (ELLs) in Canada and East Africa might be enabled to develop new twenty-first Century literacy practices through global learning networks. Elsewhere (Kendrick et al. 2012, 2013, 2014), we have reported on the innovative engagement of teachers and students, undertaken as part of our larger program of work on using digital resources, and the development of potentially transformative new (multi)literacies pedagogies in "peripheral"

M. Kendrick (✉) · M. Early
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
e-mail: maureen.kendrick@ubc.ca

M. Early
e-mail: margaret.early@ubc.ca

W. Chemjor
Kabarak University, Nakuru, Kenya
e-mail: wchemjor@kabarak.ac.ke

settings (see Blommaert 2005). In this chapter, we explore how multimodal/multilingual resources enable English Language Learners to develop digital literacy for the twenty-first Century; draw innovatively on their available resources; enrich connection with local and global communities; and enhance their range of identities for the future.

Learnable lessons are drawn from two "telling examples" from Kenya and Canada. In the first example, we examine the affordances and challenges of introducing new digital tools for communication in an under-resourced secondary school journalism club in rural Kenya. In the second example, a Canadian secondary class of new immigrant and refugee students who have experienced interrupted schooling, we first provide some context regarding our initial experiences in establishing a global learning network and then report on the tensions and challenges that emerged in the two school sites as we attempted to implement learning exchanges over a long distance.

Although there is a shared international understanding that competency in a range of literacies is required for individual and societal well-being (UNESCO 2000), there is a dearth of research and theorizing on students' use of cultural, linguistic, and multimodal resources for literacy learning (print and digital) in diverse sociocultural contexts, particularly in under-resourced nations such as those in East Africa. We know little about the potential of global learning networks for students who live in under-resourced contexts to engage in new literacy practices through participation in global conversations about their interests, shared with others in their diaspora; their online communities more broadly; and their curiosities in a global society. Additionally, we lack critical knowledge to design and interpret literacy practices that are culturally informed for the rapidly growing number of refugee students from under-resourced countries in schools across Canada. In the next section, we begin by locating this work in related scholarly and theoretical literature before turning to a description of our two research sites.

## New Literacies, Identity Construction, and Multimodality

Our research draws on literature and conceptual framing from the inter-related areas of new literacies, identity construction, and multimodality. Our focus here is on the use of multimodal and cultural resources as they are taken up in new literacy practices among youth participating in a global learning network.

Theoretical perspectives and debates in literacy as social practice research have highlighted the situated nature of cultural resources (Barton and Hamilton 1998; Gee 1996; Prinsloo and Baynham 2008; Street 1984, 2003). As Prinsloo (2005) points out however, current research and theorizing in "new literacies" (see e.g., Leu et al. 2004), often implies that new literacies are a decontextualized set of core skills to be learned (e.g., using search engines, evaluating the accuracy of information on webpages, knowing how to use email, using a word processor). Moreover, despite the popularity of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in secondary English classrooms, theorists, researchers, teachers, and teacher educa-

tors know little about the literacy practices associated with their use in local contexts, and the implications for curriculum and pedagogy (Snyder and Bulfin 2008).

Central to our research is the idea that students come to school with a multitude of different identities, communities, and hopes for the future. Norton (2000) makes the case that learners have imagined communities (i.e., groups of people with whom we desire to connect through the power of the imagination) that assume an imagined identity, and that investment in the target language (or, as we would argue practices) must be understood within this context. Cummins (2006) draws on Norton's construct of investment to argue that student investments in what he calls "identity texts" are crucial for language and literacy development. He emphasizes the need for tapping student diversity as resources for learning, and uses the term "identity texts" to describe the products that result from students' creative work or performances in pedagogical spaces designed by teachers. Students invest their identities in these creative works through their use of multiple languages and modalities. How students use the multimodal resources they have at hand reflects the world as they imagine it, and as influenced by their beliefs, values, and subjectivities. This perspective emphasizes the importance of language learners' actual and desired memberships in imagined communities, with concomitant impact on their agency, investment, and possible resistance to pedagogies that do not take their identities and investment into account.

Similarly, scholars in literacy education are increasingly recognizing that language, whether written or spoken, is only partial to how we make meaning in the world (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). Indeed, communicative events are composed of *simultaneous modes* whereby meaning is communicated in different ways through images, gestures, and speech. Kress (2000) asserts that new theories of communication require a completely new agenda that considers the full range of a society's cultural and multimodal resources. Integral to this new agenda is how cultures and individuals within cultures select from and choose to develop particular multimodal possibilities as resources for learning and communication (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996).

## Exploring Global Learning Networks

Our case studies investigates an academic area and educational context that has received insufficient attention in new literacies research but has critically important social consequences; namely, under-resourced school contexts and immigrant and refugee students. Studies in both sites used several methods of data collection: observations and reflections, photographs, focus group discussions, and collection of artifacts. Our analysis in relation to "lessons learned" was driven by "rich points"; that is, "moments of incomprehension and unmet expectations" (Agar 1996, p. 4). We ground our learnable lessons in two examples, one situated in a secondary school journalism club in rural Kenya, the other in a language and content digital media course in a high school in a large urban Canadian city.

## *Example 1: Digital Tools in an Afterschool Journalism Club in Rural Kenya*[1]

### Context

Our Kenyan research site is a government-supported girls' boarding school with an enrollment of approximately 360 students in grades 8–12. The students in AIC Secondary use Kiswahili, Sheng (a popular vernacular mixture of English, Kiswahili and indigenous languages) and indigenous languages for daily communication. In this colorful, linguistic cacophony, very little Standard English language learning can take place without overt instruction from the teacher; many students in the school are reliant on their classroom English teacher to provide explicit knowledge and situated practice. However, because Kenya's integrated secondary English curriculum combines literature and English language as one subject, classroom instruction tends to be focused more on covering the many mandated books for literature rather than addressing English language issues. Similarly, writing practices in the classroom are primarily examination oriented. The specific nature of student writing assignments often depends on the curricular classroom topics and the related writing forms, which may include letter writing, creative writing, book reviews, recipes, speeches, minutes, reports, memos, CV's, poems, dialogue, advertisements, journals, diaries, and telegrams. Although the list of forms teachers are expected to teach is quite extensive, the actual classroom practice is markedly different in that there are usually limited opportunities for students to practice writing because of huge class sizes. The school is also quite under-resourced with a very limited collection of books in the school library. Although the school has a computer lab, with about 12 desktop computers that were donated by the Korean government, access is often restricted to teachers due to lack of funding for online connectivity, upgrades, and repairs.

As a means of improving the students' English language performance on national examinations and increasing students' opportunities for writing practice, the school's English teacher (Walter, our third author) started an afterschool journalism club. The production of the journal was initially print-based and circulated to a limited readership of students and parents. In 2010, we provided digital resources (a digital camera, voice recorder, and four laptop computers with Internet access) in an effort to support the aspirations of the students and to better understand the affordances of these digital tools in this context and as part of a global learning network. In this example, we focus our attention on the 32 members of the before journalism club and their early uptake of the digital resources in the context of journalism club, which was prior to their participation in the global learning network.

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[1] Aspects of this case study have been published elsewhere. See Kendrick, Chemjor, and Early (2012) and Kendrick, Early, and Chemjor (2013).

## Lessons Learned

In their manifesto of multiliteracies, the New London Group (NLG) (2000) argues compellingly that one of the four key factors of a successful theory of pedagogy is situated practice, including "simulations of the relationships to be found in workplaces and public spaces" (p. 35). They contend that such practice is a community of learners is necessary before mastery can take place. Drawing on Vygotsky's concept of a "zone of proximal development," Cazden (1981) made a similar case earlier, arguing that (peer or expert assisted) *performance* must come before *competence*. This first example forcibly reminded us of this important learning for what emerged clearly was that the girls in the journalism club needed a period of "serious play" using the new digital resources prior to integrating them into their practice as journalists. Inherent in this "play" were opportunities for transformative "identity work", that is, opportunities to play at "performing" the identity of a journalist in a low-stakes context with their peers before immersing themselves in a more high-stakes real world context where they would be expected to display a higher degree of competence as journalists. Moreover, the NLG (2000) point out, "There is ample evidence that people do not learn anything well unless they are both motivated to learn and believe that they will be able to use and function with what they are learning in some way that is in their interests" (p. 33). This example also suggests that it was in some measure through "play" and "performance" that the girls first came to see how the affordances of the digital and the experimentation with and appropriation of new "professional" identities could function in their best interests. We came to see this play and performance as a critical precursor to establishing a global learning network between the Kenyan and Canadian schools. The following extracts from conversations with Maureen illuminate the ways in which these emerging journalists emphasized how their competence with the digital tools took time and required opportunities to rehearse and play, in increasingly authentic ways, the role of journalist, complete with the intrinsic props of camera and voice recorder and later supplemented with "press badges" created by their English teacher.

*Looking like a journalist*
Maureen: Why do you think these devices gave you access to important people, access that you didn't have without the devices?
Asha: When we have the recorders, we can be simply compared with those professional journalists, so we are journalists in short.
Mary: If we have the devices, we cannot just take the devices alone. We take up the badges, like the ones we were having yesterday, the one that is for reporters.
Maureen: Okay. So you look like a journalist?
All: Yes.
Maureen: And did you feel right away as soon as you started using these things, I am a journalist or did it take time?
Mary: It took time.
Asha: For me, and the rest of my colleagues, it was our first time to use the devices. Then another thing that was challenging, it is when you want to interview somebody [a classmate] but she is not willing to give out all the information. So at times we were forced to hide those devices for the sake of information.

As noted by Asha here, in the early stages of learning to use the digital camera and voice recorder and integrate them into existing literacy practices, the girls first needed to "rehearse" or "play" with them before a comfort level was reached. Initially, learning to technically use the digital voice recorder and to practice the linguistic repertoires of different types of journalists involved conducting pretend interviews with peers during leisure time at school. Thus, these peers became the assistants in the aspiring journalists' performances on their way to building competence. They did not always do this wittingly, however. Because their classmates had never seen a digital voice recorder, they did not always readily agree to be recorded so when playing reporter, at times the girls resorted to what they referred to as "underground journalism," which typically involved hiding the digital recorder in the sleeve of their sweater. We also discovered recordings on the voice recorder of the girls in the club pretending to be television anchorwomen. In response to a question Maureen posed about how they learned to conduct a sports interview, something that they had not done before they had access to the voice recorder, it emerged that the majority of the girls had role models whose identity they took up and performed in all their journalistic practices, as the following examples illustrate:

> *The importance of role models*
> Gift: Okay for me, I am looking upon my role model for example, Kanze Dena- a presenter in Citizen TV. Now, I used to look at what she is doing and now I just follow what she is doing.
> Maureen: Okay. So you have a role model?
> Gift: Yeah.
> Maureen: Does any one have another role model that they are trying to follow, maybe someone who is writing a story in a journal, someone who is on a TV, someone who is on a radio?
> All: Yes.
> Maureen: Who else has a role model? What kinds of role models do you have?
> Nancy: A reporter.
> Maureen: A reporter on TV?
> Nancy: Yeah. Her name is [Terryanne] Chebet.
> Maureen: Also on Citizen TV?
> Nancy: Yeah.
> Mercy: Me my role model is Maimuna Ali …
> May: Mine is a news reader in Citizen TV …
> Maureen: So most of you have role models on some TV [channel]?
> All: Yeah.

We view the underground recordings and reporting that the students engaged in, as well as the appropriation of the identity performance of their particular role model, as a kind of make-believe play. This play continued in various ways throughout the study and was critical to the process of learning to use the digital resources and gaining increased competence as an "authentic" reporter. This playfulness also allowed the members of this journalism club to create "possible roles in possible worlds" (Dyson 1997, p. 14) in a space where the pretend/imagined identities of journalists could be appropriated prior to adopting the actual identity. As Bakhtin (1981) explained, language is a "living ideological thing" because, rather than finding its origins in dictionaries, it comes from situated human interactions: "All words

have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life" (Bakhtin 1981, p. 293). Thus, the social enactment of the journalist role involves complex negotiations of new identities whereby speech, speakers, and social relationships are inextricably linked (Norton 2000).

The digital tools allowed the girls to work *multimodally*, that is, across modes, to incorporate local, cultural and historical semiotic practices of performativity, which are highly inclusive of orality, body posture, gaze and gesture. These traditional meaning-making systems were seamlessly interfaced and integrated with the use of new digital literacies in ways that we had not anticipated at the outset of the project, but in ways that worked to meet the particular interests of these young women. In terms of lessons learned, we want to emphasize the unanticipated: we did not plan for or expect that the girls would first take up the digital tools in playful interaction, performance, and rehearsals of the role of journalist. We draw from Blommaert's notion of *placed resources* in making sense of the unanticipated. His core argument is that when sociolinguistic items/communication resources travel across the globe, they need to be understood as relocated or placed resources that "will consequently be picked up differently in different places" (2003, p. 612). More specifically, what is carried with them is their shape, but their value, meaning, or function do not often travel along. In other words, the function of communicative resources is situated and context specific.

## Example 2: Linking Kenya to Canada

### Context

Our Canadian site is a publically funded secondary school in a Western Canadian city. Centrally located, close to a bustling city intersection, Trafalgar is a comprehensive school of close to 1000 students in Grades 8–12. This is a diverse community both ethnically and socio-economically. A number of the students who are ELLs are refugees who have had limited and/or interrupted schooling. While 10% of the school population are "officially" considered ELLs, the BC Ministry of Education reports approximately 68% of the students speak a language other than English at home. The major home languages reported spoken by the students are Tagalog (Philipino), Cantonese, Vietnamese, Pilipino, Mandarin, Punjabi, Tamil, Spanish, and Chinese. The students in the ELL program are from language backgrounds that are representative of the larger student population. Some are in a "late to literacy" program; these students are from diverse backgrounds including primarily Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Iraq and Sudan. Their languages include Jarai, Bahnar, Kirin, Mnong, Thai, Vietnamese, Kurdish, and Arabic or other Eritrean languages Although the students in both sites speak a number of languages, English became their default for communication because it was the only shared language among the students.

There are a number of alternative programs offered in the school as well, including those for students with special needs. Consequently, both ELL and other students travel to the school from across the district to attend these specialized programs. A key feature of the school, and for which it is widely known, is the innovative school motto/code of conduct wherein fostering respect and taking responsibility for one's actions are key features. The school has a long-standing reputation for its strengths as a caring community and for the positive teacher-student and student-student relationships.

Sally, the highly experienced and well-respected ESL teacher in Trafalgar School, is a long-term colleague of one of the authors. She is keen to have all her students benefit from the affordances of new (digital) literacies, as well as develop traditional print literacy practices. She seeks opportunities to do this in the context of authentic activities, in situated practice with texts across genres and modes produced for real audiences. At the outset of the global learning network project, we collaboratively explored a number of potential learning exchanges with her students.

## Background: Our Initial Experiences in Establishing a Global Learning Network

In our first attempts in establishing a global learning exchange, the students in the late to literacy class made "identity texts" (Cummins 2006; Cummins and Early 2011) PowerPoint presentations using visual images and limited written text to introduce themselves to the students in a senior English class in Eastern Uganda. The students portrayed the story of their journey from their home countries to Canada, together with some early impressions of their new school and city. Margaret took the presentations to our research site in rural Eastern Uganda and showed them to a class of senior English students there. While the Ugandan students were interested in the students' visual narratives, lack of material resources at the school (e.g., computers, irregular connectivity and electricity, limited bandwidth) created insurmountable difficulties in establishing on-going effective learning exchanges. Another learning exchange was established with the late to literacy class and a class of ELL students in a high school in a different Western Canadian city. This school was also located in British Columbia's Lower Mainland and had a high ELL and refugee population. The English/ESL teacher was also very well respected in her school and district and at the time, was a graduate student.

The students in this "sister-class" came primarily from countries in the economic core (e.g. Japan, Germany, China, Taiwan, and Russia) and were from very well-resourced schools in their home countries. A number of these students were fee paying international visa students from affluent family backgrounds. While this learning exchange proved more successful with respect to both online connections and face-to-face exchanges on field trips to the respective schools, it was not without difficulties and challenges. What emerged in the process were the considerable differences in language proficiencies levels, literacy skills and the lived experiences between the two ELL classes and while there were some few exceptions, the "gap"

relative to these factors between the two classes quickly widened over the course of the term. This presented challenges for students and teachers alike in designing extended and on-going units of work. On careful reflection the teachers and researchers concluded that the refugee students in Canada were more invested and interested in establishing "global" learning exchanges across the diverse languages and backgrounds that were available in their own classroom and also in connecting with other students in the wider community of their own school. Having recently travelled across the globe, the students' interests and investments now lay more particularly in the local or in connecting with their Diasporas. We turned, then, to alternative new literacies projects with these students, intended to support their interests in becoming part of and contributing to their local school community. For example, with the support of a graduate research assistant, together with their teacher, the students designed multimodal videos in which they performed a song, story or poem in their home languages, with corresponding gestures, then wrote English sub-titles and employed their emerging new digital and media literacies to add images and sound effects. These videos were shared with their classmates and with their families, which appeared to be a more effective learning exchange.

## Lessons Learned

Our second example details our first steps in implementing an exchange between Canada and Kenya undertaken with a more proficient class of ELL students, which was a combination of immigrant ELLs and refugee students who had graduated into the mainstream ESL program, and the newly digitally resourced Kenyan journalism club. We wondered if the higher proficiency level might make a difference in a learning exchange. Of interest too was that a few of the refugee students in the Canadian classroom were from Eritrea and had lived for an extended time in a Kenyan refugee camp. In this example about youth literacies in new times, we focus on the Canadian students' participation in a digital media class, which was an integrated language and content course. As part of the course, the students were learning to use Moviemaker. With the help and support of the teacher and a second graduate research assistant, the students were encouraged to make a short video that Maureen would take with her and use as an initial means of introducing the Canadian students to the students in the afterschool journalism club. Our purpose here was for the Canadian students to create a video about a social issue in their school or community or some aspect of their lives that they wanted to share with the Kenyan students. Although this was a class assignment designed by the teacher, the intention was to create opportunities and openings for students to invest their identities and interests.

As background, we start this example with observations made by our research assistant as he instructed the Canadian students in using MovieMaker to create movies for the Kenyan students:

> Before students returned to working on the computers, I asked them to think about the assignment as a movie, with them being the directors. I iterated that it was important for

each of them to have a goal or message that they wanted to convey to their counterparts
in Kenya who would be viewing the projects…. Many students seemed frustrated as they
didn't know what message they wanted to give, or what their video should look like….
Other students searched the school website to download pictures of their classmates and
of the school environment. Some students told me that including images representing the
school logo and ideology were important because these images would illustrate to the
Kenyan learners the values under which they functioned.

Many of the students responded by saying they were nervous about what the children in
Kenya would think of them when watching the videos…. One of the biggest challenges stu-
dents encountered was being able to find visual (i.e., multimodal) representations of them-
selves and their ideas. For example, one student wanted to illustrate her fun and outgoing
personality, but she lamented that her only photos were of her with friends standing still…
Several students—unhappy with images from Facebook—used the teacher's digital camera
to take photos of each other working on the computer. (Fieldnotes December, 3rd, 2010)

What strikes us in these observations is the students' first response to making a
movie for students in another part of the world, specifically, their trepidation about
how to use words and images to represent/ "write" themselves, their friends and
their school and how this multimodal text might be "read" by the Kenyan students.
Their foremost concern was not with the "goal" or "message" per se, although there
was some frustration regarding what message they wanted to give, but rather, the
students' central focal was with issues of physical appearance/identity and how
others might see them and their school community. Their concerns raise questions
about dominance of the visual and of "image" in digital communication. We asked
the Canadian students more about their decision-making process in a follow up
conversation with Maureen, Sally and the students when Maureen first returned
from showing the short movies to the students in Kenya as an impetus for an on-
line learning exchange. The conversation began with Sally asking about things they
might not want the girls in Kenya to know about their school, that is, what image
they would not want to represent:

Sally:            Anything that you can think of that you thought, 'No, I don't want
                  people to know that about Trafalgar School'?
Several students: Bullying.
Sally:            You didn't want them to know that some bullying happens here?
Students:         Yeah.
Sally:            Irina, what do you think about bullying here.
Irina:            I've never seen it here.
Sally:            You haven't seen it here?
Irina:            Only in the Philippines.
Sally:            Only in the Philippines.

One of our goals in setting up the global learning network was for students to share
social issues that were a concern in their schools and communities. We hoped that
these concerns might offer points of connection and opportunities for dialogue and
problem-solving across the two school sites. We were surprised that the Canadian
students did not want the Kenyan students to know about their experiences with
bullying, even though these seemed infrequent. These social concerns may be much

more personal than we had anticipated and therefore difficult to share with unfamiliar people in an unfamiliar place. We learned from this experience that establishing global learning networks require time and space for students to explore points of connection and their own comfort levels in disclosing aspects of their local context.

Similarly, we also discovered that the Kenyan girls wanted to keep hidden certain aspects of their local context, as evident in the following exchanges and observations:

> Maureen: One of the things that first struck me when I showed the girls in Kenya your videos is that first focus on what looks different, what's different about our school. There's sort of a comparison around difference but then the questions that they started to ask me were more about finding ways to connect and how your experiences might be common experiences…. A lot of you put the school emblem into your videos and so they started to refer to your school as the "C.O.C." school because they saw that emblem quite a lot. They were surprised I think too about how multicultural Canada is. I think they had some ideas about who Canadian people are and I think they were a little bit surprised to find out that we speak many languages and we come from many different countries…. Oh, and they really liked the music [you included in the videos].

When the girls in Kenya first saw the videos from their Canadian counterparts, they were quite fixated on the structure and appearance of Trafalgar School, taking particular note of the colourful school walls with the painted "C.O.C." emblem. By comparison, their own school had much more limited facilities. During Maureen's visit, they insisted that she not take any pictures of the school facilities to show to the Canadian students. It was evident that they were concerned how the other students would view their own school. We wonder about the role of the exchange in fostering this sense of apprehension. Although the students in both school sites might have had similar life experiences in living at times in under-resourced contexts, the circumstances of the Canadian students were now markedly different than those of the Kenyans.

A message that the Kenyan girls did want to communicate about education, however, was the importance they placed on being able to attend school. When the girls in Kenya created videos to share, they used music, dance, and performance. Here, they blended their existing cultural resources with newly introduced modes of communication. The response of the Canadian students was again not as we anticipated. In this example, one of the Kenyan girls sang a song entitled, "Do you know a girl can be someone?" The lyrics portray the experience of many adolescent girls in Kenya as they struggle to get an education beyond primary school. In the conversation that followed the video sharing, what seemed evident to us was that the Canadian students did not connect with the Kenyan student's experience in a way that was readily apparent, despite the far-ranging life experiences of both the refugee and immigrant students in the group.

Maureen:      Do you understand why she might be singing this song?
Irina:           For her rights.
Maureen:      Can you say more about that? What do you think her rights are?
Irina:           (shrugs) I don't know.

| Maureen: | … for a lot of you, wherever you've been in the world, wherever you've lived, you may know that not everyone has a chance to go to school. In Canada, everyone does have a chance to go to school but in many places in the world they don't…. and especially girls. In Africa…. families who don't have a lot of money have to make a choice about who gets to go to school, my son or my daughter? And most often … |
|---|---|
| Irina: | Boys go. |

Our conversation did not progress much beyond the few responses we report here. It is difficult for us to know why the students were so reticent to engage in extended instructional conversations around social justice issues such as bullying, gender issues and girl's rights. Possible reasons may be lack of interest, low levels of language proficiency or their lack of comfort in discussing personal matters on "difficult topics". We have had past experiences where we have observed how lower proficiency level ELL refugee students manage to convey very complex narratives and express opinions when they have been deeply invested in the topic. So, it may be reasonable to venture that these topics held no interest in this context where bullying was relatively rare and girl's rights, at least in the public domain, were not at issue. It may also be reasonable to speculate, as we did above, that these were issues that were confined to the personal, private sphere of their socio-cultural, ethnic and religious life worlds and as such, they were topics that were too "risky" to disclose life experiences and values in "global learning exchanges" in ethnically diverse co-education classrooms. Whatever the reason the Canadian students' response was in sharp contrast to that of the girls in the Kenyan journalism club who had no such reservations in publically voicing their views on issues of social justice (Kendrick et al. 2013). Moreover, the Canadian students were not keen to take up the invitation to engage in further exchanges. Like the lower level proficiency students, their interests and investments were in their local and online communities or their Diasporas. We might speculate that the interests and imagined futures evoked by their image of girls who attended boarding school and wore school uniforms did not match with their own lives, which were already socially full and complex with the challenges of staying in touch with old friends in the Diaspora, as they made new ones attended school, church, extra curricular activities and in some cases worked.

## Lessons Learned Overall

These examples serve to explicate the assumptions we made and lessons we learned in designing an online learning exchange across global contexts. In sum, as we consider our research across these two examples, there are several important lessons that we identity in relation to establishing global learning networks for youth. From our experiences, we lend our support to Prinsloo and Rowsell's (2012) claim that, "research needs to take account of the specificity, affordances and limits of place, conceived in both geographic terms and as social sites that are shaped by politics,

history, economics and culture" (p. 271). Our two sites had very distinct ways in which the digital tools were taken up as "placed resources" with respect to access, the power the tools afforded, and the investments made. As social sites, they also varied greatly in terms of gender mix and ethnic diversity. We underestimated the impact of the geographical and social factors, specifically, the unanticipated affordances of the digital in Kenya and the potential constraints of the social, cultural and political in Canada. Building on Prinsloo and Rowsell (2012), we would add that in evolving, capacity-building, collaborative research such as ours, the emerging interests, identities, and investments of the learners are also vitally important to take into account and to respond to in the context of the research. In the Kenyan context, the students had self-selected into the journalism club, the digital tools supported their clear interests, and imagined identities, and so they invested. In the Canadian context, we made assumptions that making such videos for a public audience would be of interest to the students, which proved to be relatively unfounded in the long-term interests of these students, despite attempts to give students ownership over the content and representation. This reminded us forcefully of the importance of language learners' actual and desired memberships in imagined communities, with related impact on their agency, investment, and possible resistance.

Relatedly, there are likely to be critical precursors that researchers, in collaboration with teachers, need to engage learners with before attempting to set up a global learning network (and perhaps any/many other forms of youth literacies practices). In the Kenyan context the precursor was the opportunity to "play" and to do "identity work" in low-stakes contexts. In the Canadian context, in part because of the timing of Maureen's trip to Kenya, we did not sufficiently provide such a "safe space" in the media literacy class in which the students had an opportunity to "play" and "perform" their identities and test them with trusted peers to get feedback and develop expertise before asking them to share their "identity texts" with a more public and distant audience. We learned from this experience that in establishing global learning networks it is vitally important to provide time and space for students to explore and have agency in determining both the points of connection and their own comfort levels in disclosing aspects of their local context and private lifeworlds.

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# Chapter 8
# eGranary and Digital Identities of Ugandan Youth

**Bonny Norton**

## Introduction

> I think it's important for the teachers to use eGranary in teaching us because if they use eGranary in the class and teach us, the students can come on a screen of the computer and see exactly what is the teacher is trying to teach and understand. [Zuena, Ugandan student, November, 2008].
> It's important when the student is allowed to search information on his or her own, will be able to discover and internalize information easily. (Mary, Ugandan teacher, August, 2009)

Zuena and Mary, who hail from different rural regions of Uganda, are participants in a program of research on language and literacy education, conducted in collaboration with faculty and graduate students (Ugandan and Canadian) at the University of British Columbia (UBC). They are discussing some of the merits of the eGranary digital portable library, which has been incorporated into the UBC research program. As student and teacher, respectively, Zuena and Mary are highlighting the potential of digital technology to enhance learning and teaching, and to promote both collaborative and independent learning.

Responding to an invitation by Ugandan scholars, a research team at UBC has for more than a decade been researching the potential of new literacies to transform educational practice in the country, particularly with respect to language and literacy education. This chapter will focus on the research we have conducted with the eGranary digital portable library, documenting its strengths and limitations for learning and teaching. To this end, the chapter draws on insights from students, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers in diverse regions of Uganda. The chapter begins with a description of eGranary, and provides background to the use of digital technologies in Ugandan education. It then addresses the theoretical framework for our research, following up with an elaboration our research program with respect to eGranary in particular. Findings and analysis provide a larger context in which to understand the insights provided by Zuena and Mary above.

B. Norton (✉)
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
e-mail: bonny.norton.@ubc.ca

## The eGranary Digital Library

The Dakar 2000 demand for *Education for All* by 2015 is based on the premise that education is a human right that enables people to improve their lives and transform their societies (UNESCO 2000, p. 8), a process that is enhanced by engagement with technology and the Internet (Burbules and Torres 2000; Stromquist 2002). A United Nations 2006 report notes that while 14 % of the world's population was using the Internet by 2004, over half the population in developed regions had access to the Internet, compared to only 7 % in developing countries, and less than 1 % in the 50 "least developed countries" (UNDESA 2006). The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2000 thus called for global partnerships that make available the benefits of new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies (ICTs). Notwithstanding the excitement about the potential of ICTs to transform learning and teaching in Uganda, one of the world's 50 "least developed" countries, two well-documented problems are connectivity and bandwidth (Castells 1996; De Roy 1997; Warschauer 2003). Our team has learnt that conventional uses of ICT, apart from mobile phones, are beyond the reach of most Ugandan students and teachers, particularly in rural areas (Mutonyi and Norton 2007). In our search for more creative approaches to ICT, we have drawn on a range of low technology instruments, such as cameras and audio recorders, to explore intersections between ICT and literacy (Kendrick et al. 2006). In this process, we have identified the new 'internet in a box' eGranary portable digital library as a potentially powerful resource.

The eGranary system, which is continually updated, was developed by the Widernet Project at the University of Iowa in the United States (www.egranary.org). It is an intranet that comprises a 750 Gb hard drive with specialized browsing software, which can be attached to a PC or a local area network. It contains approximately 10 million educational documents, including Wikipedia, which can be searched like the Internet. While electric or solar power is needed to run the system, there is no need for connection to the wider Internet, and costs are kept as relatively low. Not only does eGranary provide a wealth of information for users, but users can also develop digital skills like browsing and searching, without connectivity. Further, the system can be updated, and includes software that enables users to upload local content and distribute it to other users. While the development of eGranary remains in progress, the ones used in our research program are the first generation made available by the Widernet Project. In June 2008, we contacted Cliff Missen, the Director of the eGranary project, to order the product, and to invite him to meet our research team at UBC. We learnt that if eGranary is to achieve its potential in Ugandan education, both students and teachers needed to be able to adapt the system to local needs. To provide insight into these local needs, the next section provides a description of the Ugandan contexts in which we conducted our research.

## Digital Technology in the Ugandan Context

Uganda, like many countries in the developing world, faces many challenges of poverty, political instability, gender inequities, and HIV/AIDS. In 2001, in a population of approximately 28 million, the population below the poverty line was estimated at 35 %, and the literacy rate approximately 70 %, with males at 80 % and females 60 % (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, UBOS 2002). A British Protectorate until 1962 when Uganda was granted independence, English is now the official language, although few Ugandans speak it as a mother tongue. There are many ethnic groups in the country, with over 60 languages in use. With 80 % of the population living in rural areas, access to ICTs remains an ongoing challenge.

However, despite multiple challenges, Uganda's educational ambitions with respect to accessing new technologies have much in common with the most developed regions of the world (Brock-Utne 2000; De Roy 1997; Tikly 2003), and the Ugandan Ministry of Education is seeking diverse means of incorporating new technologies into its education system. There is a growing recognition that contemporary ICTs are becoming increasingly influential in the country, especially among young people (Edejer 2000; Nawaguna 2005), many of whom are experienced in cell phone and Internet use in terms of text messaging and resource searching. The National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) is currently trying to develop an ICT curriculum for teachers and schools, capitalizing on out-of-school ICT practices. Further, to promote ICT usage, some organizations are stepping in to provide access to contemporary communication media (Jensen 2002). Makerere and Kyambogo Universities are becoming centers for training teachers to use the Internet as a resource in their classrooms (U-connect.org 2005; USAID 2006), and some 130 urban schools have benefited from the U-connect initiative (Nawaguna 2005). Computer science has been introduced as a subject in many of these schools, although it is currently not an examinable subject in the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) (Eremu, n.d).

In order to bridge the rural and urban ICT divide, Worldlink and Schoolnet are setting up telecenters in rural schools (Mayanja 2002). While only about 30 primary schools have so far benefited from this initiative, the goal is to connect all schools through Schoolnet. In addition, the goal is to provide subsidized Internet services to teachers and students to enable them to develop more teaching materials. The major concern is that there are few curriculum resources in schools, and the hope is that ICT and especially the Internet can ease the resource burden in schools. The challenge, in addition to electricity cut-offs, is the limited number of Internet providers and the high costs of satellite via telephone connections (U-connect.org 2005). In general, there remain relatively few people in rural communities of Uganda who access contemporary ICT services, including radios, TVs, cell phones, and computers. It is this context that eGranary has much potential to address prevailing ICT challenges in Ugandan education.

## Research Questions and Methodology

In a prescient observation, Warschauer (2010, p. 136) argues that as efforts to expand educational technology into the developing world increase, "a host of new research questions related to digital literacy practices and outcomes will be thrust on the agenda." The two eGranary research questions we have addressed in our Ugandan research program are as follows: (i) how does eGranary function as a placed resource in Ugandan education? (ii) to what extent do identities shift as multilingual students and teachers engage with eGranary and develop digital literacy? These research questions are centrally concerned with the innovative use of educational resources to promote social inclusion in the wider global community (Warschauer 2003).

Reviewers have asked how and why Canadian researchers have become active in an East African research program, and some have raised questions about the extent to which this research may be producing a local elite in the African context, with young people who may aspire to a future that may be unattainable for most of them. Are we helping to produce "third world consumers of first world technology"? Could eGranary be another cultural imperialist tool? It is important to note that our research program began with an invitation from our Ugandan colleagues to work with them on research projects of interest and importance to the Ugandan community. Their position, and ours, is that research is a conversation between local and international stakeholders, and that we need to work collaboratively to set protocols, determine priorities, and assess progress. Our research projects with eGranary were thus conducted in the spirit of capacity-building advocated by the indigenous scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Smith 1999), who argues that research should be of benefit to all stakeholders in the research process, enhancing future possibilities for research participants and their communities. We have discussed in prior publication (Norton and Early 2011), that researchers, nevertheless, need to be vigilant about unequal relations of power between researchers and participants, and, as Stein (2008, p. 17) notes, "it also means being extra-sensitive to the possibilities of absences and silences in the data, which may come about due to cultural, linguistic, gender and racial differences."

Drawing on research conducted in marginalized communities internationally (see Snyder and Prinsloo 2007), Mutonyi and Norton (2007) identified five "lessons" that are relevant to ICT research in Uganda: Collect empirical data that can be used by policy makers and curriculum planners; recognize local differences between rural and urban areas; promote professional development of teachers and teacher educators; integrate in-school and out-of-school digital literacy practices; and provide opportunities for Ugandans to both access and contribute to global knowledge production. These insights were integral to our research program with eGranary, begun in 2008, and conducted at five separate sites in widely dispersed regions of Uganda. Research on eGranary was not the only focus of research conducted at each site, but was incorporated into each respective case study. The five regions are in both rural and urban areas, including: the Masaka area in the south-

western part of Uganda, where we worked with Kyato youth in a community library (Norton and Williams 2012); the Mbale area in the east, where we worked with Sibatya Secondary School teachers and students (Early and Norton 2011, 2012); the Gulu area in the north, where we worked with teachers from four primary schools (Oates 2012); the city of Kampala in central Uganda, where we worked with teacher educators (Andema et al. 2013); and Arua in the northwest, where we are currently working with a primary teachers' college and two rural schools (Abiria et al. 2013). While an eGranary was already installed at the Kyato site when our research began, we donated an eGranary and laptop computer to each of the other four sites in our research program. Insights from research participants have been shared in diverse data forms, including face-to-face interviews (conducted in English), question-naires, email exchanges, professional conversations, photographs, video-footage, and written and audio-taped reflections. The names of research participants and schools are pseudonyms.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the research is drawn from work in two related areas, each broadly corresponding to the two research questions, respectively: (i) the New Literacy Studies; and (ii) language and identity.

### *Digital innovations in New Literacy Studies*

Research on digital innovations in New Literacy Studies (NLS) that is relevant to our project is associated with the work of Hornberger (2003), Prinsloo (2005), Blommaert (2010), and Street (2001). These researchers take the position that lit-eracy practices cannot be isolated from other social practices, and that literacy must be understood with reference to larger historical, social, and economic processes. However, as scholars such as Snyder and Prinsloo (2007) and Warschauer (2003) note, much of the research on digital innovations in this area has focused on research in wealthier regions of the world, and there is a great need for research in poorly-resourced communities to contribute to global debates on new literacies. The extent to which digital resources offer opportunities for users, and the ways in which they are used, needs to be established by research, rather than simply assumed.

In contrasting old and new literacies, Prinsloo (2005) distinguishes between literacies that are paper-based with ones that integrate written, oral, and audiovi-sual modalities within screen-based and networked electronic systems. Drawing on Blommaert (2002), Prinsloo argues that despite their global impact, the new lit-eracies, including digital literacies, "are best studied as resources situated in social practices that have local effect" (2005, p. 87)—they are, in other words, "placed resources." He critiques models of globalization that do not address complexity and

hybridity at local level, arguing that what is needed is a theory of globalization that seeks to understand local cultural processes.

Blommaert (2003, 2010), focusing more on language than literacy, argues similarly that there needs to be a paradigmatic shift from the study of language as static to one that is dynamic. As he notes, "[W]henever sociolinguistic items travel across the globe, they travel across structurally different spaces and will consequently be picked up differently in different places" (2003, p. 612). These different places, Blommaert argues, are structured by inequality, and the impact of social and cultural forms of capital across these spaces, whether geographical or social, varies greatly. His conception of place as "scale," which captures the relationship between space and time, is a useful lens through which to analyse our data on practices associated with eGranary. The scale associated with an event has important implications for what Blommaert calls its "indexical meaning." This refers to instances of communication that can be seen as "pointing towards socially and culturally ordered norms, genres, traditions, expectations" (2010, p. 33). In addition, whenever discourses travel globally, Blommaert argues, what is of great interest is not their shape, so to speak, but their value, meaning, and function. These are "a matter of uptake, they have to be *granted* by others, on the basis of dominant indexical frames and hierarchies" (2003, p. 616, italics in original). As Blommaert notes:

> Consequently, we are facing '*placed resources*' here: resources that are functional in one particular place but can become dysfunctional as soon as they are moved into other places. The process of mobility creates difference in value, for the resources are allocated different functions. The indexical links between signs and modes of communication, and social value scales allowing, for example, identity construction, status attribution and so forth— these indexical links are severed and new ones are projected onto the signs and practices. (2003, p. 619)

As eGranary "travels" from a highly industrialized site in North America to poorly resourced sites in Uganda, what value is ascribed to eGranary and what functions does it serve? What are the indexical links between eGranary and Ugandan sociocultural norms, traditions, and expectations? Such questions provide a window into both practice and theory with regard to digital innovations and New Literacy Studies.

## *Language and Identity*

While Blommaert expresses some interest in the relationship between language and identity, as do other new literacy studies scholars, this relationship is of central interest to my own work on identity and investment in the field of language education (Norton 2013). Drawing on poststructuralist theory, particularly associated with the work of Christine Weedon (1996), I take the position that 'identity' is not a fixed character trait, but must be understood with reference to a learner's relationship to the wider social world, changing across time and space, and reproduced in social interaction. In this view, I argue, identity cannot be essentialized; it has multiple

dimensions, is constantly changing, and often a site of struggle. The construct of investment, which I developed to complement notions of motivation in the field of language education, has broader application to other areas of language, literacy, and learning (Norton 2013). Inspired by the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1991), and drawing on a wide range of research, I make the case that learners invest in the target language at particular times and in particular settings, because they believe they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will increase the value of their cultural capital and social power. As the value of learners' cultural capital increases, so learners reassess their sense of themselves and their desires for the future. Hence, I argue, there is an integral relationship between learner investment and learner identity. Further, investment assumes a wider range of questions associated with a learner's commitment to learning. In this chapter, more specifically, I ask, 'What is the learner's investment in the digital literacy practices of eGranary?'

Related to the construct of investment is that of imagined communities and imagined identities (Anderson 1991; Kanno and Norton 2003; Norton 2013; Pavlenko and Norton 2007). Developing this notion with reference to language education, I have argued that in many language classrooms, learners may have the opportunity to invest not only in the classroom community, but in communities of the imagination—desired communities that offer possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future. Imagined identities can be highly varied, from the imagined identity of the more public professional, such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers, to that of the more local homemaker or farm worker. I argue that an imagined community assumes an imagined identity, and that investment in language or literacy practices must be understood within this context.

## Findings and Analysis

I now return to the two research questions that are the focus of this chapter, and address the relevant findings:

1. how does eGranary function as a placed resource in Ugandan education?
2. to what extent do identities shift as multilingual students and teachers engage with eGranary and develop digital literacy?

### *eGranary as a Placed Resource in Ugandan Education*

In seeking to understand how eGranary functions as a placed resource in Ugandan education, with particular meanings and functions across space and time, I begin with an extract of a conversation that Margaret Early and I had with a number of teachers at Sibatya Secondary School in August 2009. The teachers were

commenting on the limited resources available at this rural school, where classes
sometimes reach 200, and the teacher may be the only person with a textbook:

Teacher 1    In fact the teacher is just the (whole) Bible-
Teacher 2    The teacher is just the Bible in the school. [laughs]
Teacher 1    There is no other [laughs]
Norton       Is that right, the teacher is the person who has the knowledge.
Teacher 2    Yes.
Teacher 1    Yeah
Norton       There is nobody else.
Teacher 1    Yeah.
Teacher 2    Because the students-
Early        The "e-Granary."
Norton       You're the e-Granary.
Teacher 1    [laughs]

In such local contexts where resources are minimal, and the teacher is in fact often
the sole source of information for students, constituting "the whole Bible" or the
metaphorical "eGranary", a digital portable library has great potential to provide a
large database of information, materials, and resources for both students and teach-
ers. Teachers from Sibatya Secondary School noted that the eGranary has a wealth
of information, and that "in the absence of textbooks, as it has been in most schools
in Uganda, the eGranary is very resourceful". Teachers noted other advantages, in-
cluding the fact that it is "easy to store and access information", "easily portable and
usable where there is no internet service", "cheaper", and "more reliable" than the
Internet. Lauryn Oates, working with teachers in the Gulu area, noted in an email of
February 25, 2010, that teachers particularly liked the Tools for Teachers resources,
while Sam Andema, who participated in an eGranary workshop at Bondo Primary
Teachers' College in Kampala, on June 18, 2010, had similar findings:

> At the end of the session I asked participants to share with me their experiences with the
> use of ICT broadly and the eGranary more specifically and the possibility of integrating
> it in their professional practice. Interestingly, participants were all positive about the pos-
> sibility of integrating ICT in their professional practice. It was exciting to hear participants
> explaining how they could use ICT to improve their teaching in their respective subjects.

Teachers were particularly interested in ways in which eGranary could improve stu-
dent learning and encourage independence on the part of students: "It's important
when the student is allowed to search information on his or her own, will be able
to discover and internalize information easily," said Mary, a teacher at Sibatya Sec-
ondary School, quoted at the beginning of the chapter. Our research has provided
much evidence of the challenges students face in learning independently, given the
scarcity of resources available. Another teacher at Sebatya noted perceptively that
"Learners can access information without necessarily having to move out of their
setting," a very important consideration in contexts in which transportation is lim-
ited and costly.

   Students themselves were also quick to see the potential of eGranary to improve
learning, as Zuena, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, noted. EGranary would

provide students with an additional source of information besides the teacher, and an opportunity to read and reread information that might not have been initially comprehensible. Both students and teachers saw in eGranary an opportunity to access a wide range of information, and to better understand their own location—geographical, political, and personal. They eagerly sought information about their President Museveni, about the history of Uganda and its people, and about Africa more broadly, but they also used eGranary to make sense of more personal histories and experiences. Theo, a student at Kyato library, for example, spent much time searching for information about fish, explaining as follows:

> When I was young, I could see people moving down the lake just feeding the fish in the water … and then my grandmother was always cooking fish, mostly on Sundays, and then it was very sweet. So that's why I check all the information about fish. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

Both students and teachers commented that the use of the commercial Internet was difficult because they had to go to an Internet café to use it, which was expensive, and the costs were exacerbated by the slow bandwidth, because they paid for usage by the minute. With eGranary, users could search for information without having to pay for the period of time in which it was used. As Theo said,

> Because I can search different information from the eGranary, thus I can even spend little time, or much of the time without going to the Internet just to pay money. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

From a different perspective, a student Mohammed took the opportunity to learn the eGranary and the computer in order to develop a provisional plan for his future. In the event that he could no longer attend school due to financial constraints, he could take advantage of his computer skills to seek related employment until he was able to return to school. As he noted,

> For me, it will help me because I may, I may, I may leave the KCSS. I could, I should, I could finish my "O" level when I have no further assistance for further education, so I may use that knowledge that I acquired from the eGranary to get jobs like secretariat and also some simple jobs like playing discos, playing music on discos, and also other jobs in the category of computers. So I'm gaining future knowledge on the eGranary. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

However, some the limitations associated with the use of eGranary, and ICT more broadly, were the cause of much frustration and disappointment. As Andema noted in his 2010 report:

> [Workshop participants] were also cognizant of the possible challenges they would most likely face in trying to integrate ICT in their professional practice. Examples of the possible challenges mentioned included: not having personal computers to use at their convenience, lack of power point projectors at the college, intermittent electricity supply, and having limited skills and knowledge of ICT.

At the local level, the site into which most eGranary systems were placed had little socioeconomic infrastructure, no electricity, and no running water. Teachers at Sebatya noted with disappointment that eGranary "Works only on electric power", and is "'useless without electricity." It was sometimes only with solar power that the

eGranary was able to operate, and even this resource was often unreliable. As the student Theo at Kyato noted,

> Power is still a problem, because we just use the solar system and then sunshine takes sometimes long without shining, and it rains for two and three days. So if it rains and then to me there is no power. So we just need more solar panels just to connect the power to the computers. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

Lauryn Oates, drawing on her research in the Gulu district, noted that teachers had experienced problems with installation of eGranary onto the laptop computer, and that problems were exacerbated when technical support was not available:

> [The technology assistant] needs to be on hand to get the program going each time the lab opens, or if there is a power outage and things need to be restarted. Sometimes he is away from the lab or busy, which is a problem if users can't start up the program easily on their own. (email to Norton, February 25, 2010)

Oates also noted in her research that there is a need for more material with an African perspective, while teachers at Sibatya noted that information on the eGranary could be a little overwhelming. As one teacher said:

> [The eGranary] has too much information, some of which we might not need … right? For our purposes. So we're looking at the possibility of looking for those sensitive topical issues which we need for our own particular [course work]. (Interview, August 2009)

The central challenge for teachers is to determine what information on eGranary is in fact relevant to their needs, and how best to access it. As a teacher at Sibatya noted,

> So our coming together like this is a way of putting out heads together to know what you can grasp—you can grasp a small part, he grasps another one, she gets another one. Now tomorrow the part which defeats you to get is the one you run to the friend and say 'now how do we do this?' so that together we can access that information for our own good. (Interview, August, 2009)

Another limitation of eGranary is associated with the fact that information on the downloaded websites is "frozen" in time, and some information may be out of date. When we were conducting our research at Kyato community library in 2008, for example, Barack Obama, an African-American, was standing for election as President of the USA. Although this was not a local event, it created much interest in Kyato, as it did in many parts of the world. One student, for example, tried to search the eGranary to address the following question, "How did Obama get to be in America since he is a black person?" Interestingly, because the particular eGranary that was sent to Kyato only included information to December 11, 2006, students were unable to locate much information about Obama on eGranary, except that he was a popular senator in the state of Illinois. Further, when they searched for information about Obama's rival, John McCain, they were directed to McCain foods, and came up with many references to McCain's pizza pops, frozen foods sold in North America. This was clearly a limitation of eGranary.

At Kyato community library, we also became aware of a darker set of practices associated with eGranary, which could not possibly meet local demands for its use.

The students often made reference to the fact that only one eGranary was available, but that hundreds of students and many teachers wished to use it. As Williams noted in her journal on October 13, 2008:

> EGranary has created mild chaos in the library. Order in the court! Big crowds have started to cause a lot of disturbance (to me and Dan especially) and distraction. Will next discuss establishing order around the computer. Rules and signup sheets perhaps? Yes!

Because of the "chaos" in the library, Williams in fact wrote a "Notice to All Computer Users" in which she outlined "a few friendly rules to follow" with the use of eGranary, and attached it to the eGranary computer. Despite these rules, however, competition for the use of eGranary became intense, and, occasionally, Williams had to limit the use of eGranary to only the research participants. This led to resentment amongst students who were not included in the eGranary study. Comments from the excluded students were typified by the following: "Why send us away from computer and yet we want to learn?" (Williams 2009, p. 64).

## *eGranary and Digital Identities*

While research on placed resources is theoretically generative, what Blommaert and Prinsloo do not develop more fully is the issue of "uptake" by participants in a given literacy event. As indicated in the theoretical framework, Blommaert notes that when discourses travel, their value is "a matter of uptake, they have to be *granted* by others, on the basis of dominant indexical frames and hierarchies" (2003, p. 616). Of central interest in our research program was precisely the issue of "uptake", or what I would call the investments of students and teachers in eGranary, and the extent to which the identities of users were implicated in the indexical meaning of practices associated with eGranary.

A central argument of this chapter is that users were highly invested in eGranary because eGranary expanded the range of identities available to them, in both the present time and in their imagined futures. It is clear from our data that users' cultural capital and social power increased as they became more digitally literate and proficient with eGranary, and digital technology more broadly. In our research at Kyato community library, for example (Norton and Williams 2012), the students who were part of the study were initially learners and trainees. By the end of the research, the students had transitioned from being learners and trainees to teachers and trainers, sharing knowledge, skills and information with students, teachers and other members of the wider community. They took their identities as trainers very seriously, considering it their responsibility to make the eGranary accessible to the community, residents of other villages, and even "the world in general." As Theo noted,

> I want to spread technology about, over the village and then, if time goes on, even the world in general, because there are many people in our villages that don't know about using the computer, and they cannot read. But if I train them how to use the computer, you never know, they can use it. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

As the students in the Kyato study developed their skills and it became known at the school that this particular group of students had access to information and technology, they became more valuable members of the school community. It was well recognized by members of the community that they might need the assistance of research participants to gain access to eGranary, and to use it effectively. As Mohammed said,

> The library scholars, the eGranary has helped us to be famous, known, because many students have come to know that we are (?) whereby we use the eGranary to teach them how to find information on the eGranary and also the outside people have tried to come across us so that we can teach them. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

Over time, the eGranary and the laptop computer were no longer seen as mere physical tools and material resources—they became meaningful symbolic resources as well. The eGranary was associated with improved academic performance, enhanced possibilities of employment, increased financial resources, and greater access to social networking. Students were highly invested in the new technology, as they saw great benefits accruing from the knowledge gained and the digital skills acquired; indeed, a range of imagined identities emerged. The following extracts reflect the relationship between student identities, learning, and imagination. As Zuena said,

> I want help my generation also, our young sisters and brothers to have computers and to be allowed to come here in the community library and use computers because it is more important in the future to be knowing the computers. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

Zuena hoped to become a social worker in the future so that she could help her community learn and advance, and help local residents who were suffering from various health and social problems. She emphasized the importance of computers in the future education and progress of her generation, and was eager to play a part in this transformation.

John, similarly, was aware that digital literacy increases the privileges he had in his community. As he said,

> Yeah, it's, computer can give us advantages. Even you can get a job in the future for computer in, for example, in supermarkets you can get a job for accountants with a computer … I like to be a teacher! … I would like to teach biology and mathematics. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

The following quote from Joseph provides evidence of the value he places on being well known in the community. Throughout his interview, he emphasized the desire for public recognition, both for himself and for the library. Personal fame would make him more widely known as an intelligent, well-educated and well-trained individual. His comments also reflect his desire to share his knowledge and to help others. By being well known, he can serve as a resource person in the village. As he said,

> For me, I think it is important for me because I will, first of all I will be known, as I have some knowledge of using the eGranary. Some people will be, who will have come from very far, will tell others there is a gentleman, I am a gentleman, Joseph, eh? That he knows the eGranary, who can help you, can guide you, that is on my side very useful to be known by the community. It is a good thing. (Interview, November 24, 2008).

The data suggest that practices associated with eGranary, including social network-ing, enhanced what was "socially imaginable" (Prinsloo, personal communication. May 14, 2011) for these students. For example, we found that the University of British Columbia, most likely unknown to many of the students prior to the UBC research program, became one of the students' favorite sites on eGranary. Theo, for one, was eager to go to UBC to further his studies. His imagined identity was that of an internationally trained doctor. As he noted,

> My name is Theo. So mostly I want to ask different questions about the people of the Uni-versity of British Columbia. I'm willing to join you in next two, three years. So that's after my S6. So because I'm just remaining with two years then to be almost done with my S6. So I expect to join your university. So that's where I become—I want to become a doctor. (Interview, November 24, 2008)

Further, it was interesting to note that eGranary also increased the social value of the educational site in which it was placed, at both local and translocal levels. As the student Joseph said,

> It is helpful that it can attract people to come and use it, eh? So that the eGranary can be known by many people, the library can be known. e.g. someone from far, like from Kam-pala, can come and see that the machine can display such information, and can tell many people that they can come—that our eGranary—that our library would be known all over the world, the country, and even outside the country. (Interview November 24, 2008)

## Discussion

Findings from our research illustrate the ways in which eGranary functioned as a placed resource in a variety of educational sites across Uganda, and how issues of identity and investment are associated with the uptake of this particular digital re-source. In a context in which material resources like textbooks are in short supply, where the Internet is largely unavailable and financially inaccessible, and where large class sizes compromise teaching effectiveness, the eGranary has enormous potential as a resource with extensive sources of information and the capability of promoting digital literacy in poorly resourced communities, despite challenging lo-cal conditions, to be discussed in greater detail below. Further, with regard to issues of identity and investment, the data suggest that both the knowledge gained from eGranary, as well as the new literacies developed, enhanced what was socially imag-inable to Ugandan youth: advanced education, professional careers, study abroad, and other opportunities became part of the students' imagined futures and imagined identities. This is not to suggest that what was socially imaginable was also socially available, however, and remains an issue of great concern to all stakeholders in this project, both Ugandan and Canadian. However, it was clear that as the students developed valued digital skills and the ability to serve as trainers to other members of their communities, their identities shifted, and they gained increasing cultural capital and social power.

While it could be argued that eGranary did indeed "travel well" to Uganda, local constraints in the country nevertheless greatly limited its potential. Warschauer (2003) has argued that four key resources are needed to promote meaningful access to and use of ICT, particularly in the developing world, and it is helpful to consider the strengths and limitations of eGranary with reference to his four-part model. First, Warschauer argues that physical resources, such as computers and the Internet are key to uptake. As we saw with eGranary, while Ugandan students and teachers welcomed eGranary, the fact that there was only one digital portable library in each site, with one laptop, was a severe limitation. The lack of electricity was also a major hindrance in the use of eGranary, and there was disappointment that eGranary did not enable students and teachers to connect electronically with other users. Warschauer's second key resource, "digital resources," refers to online content and tools in multiple languages, appropriate to the needs of diverse learners. While the content on eGranary was extensive, the information did not extend beyond 2006; further, most of the content was available in English only, a concern to both Ugandan and international scholars (Canagarajah 1999).

The third set of resources are called "human resources," and Warschauer refers to knowledge and skills developed through instruction, critical inquiry, and situated practice, asking as follows: How can ICT support literacy, and how can literacy support ICT? While all the participants in our research program were literate, and used English with relative ease, it is interesting to recall the comment made by Zuena in which she suggested that students and teachers should share the eGranary screen, so that students would know what teachers were trying to teach them. The suggestion here is that ICT provided students with direct access to information, so that learning could be co-constructed by teacher and student. The fourth key resource, "social resources," refers to the community, institutional, and societal structures that support access to ICT. In our study we found that despite educational policy goals that support the use of ICT in education, resources at local level remained extremely limited, and compromised the effectiveness of eGranary. Further, it is of great concern that these limited social resources may also limit the realization of students' imagined identities. The report card on eGranary is thus a mixed one; despite its great potential, limited key resources at local level reduced its impact and uptake across time and space.

# Conclusion

In a sociolinguistics of globalization, Blommaert (2010) argues that there is a shift in seeing language as tied to a community, a time and place, and serving local functions, to seeing language as existing in and for mobility across time and space. Further, the process of mobility creates difference in value with respect to a given resource, and this has implications for its indexical meaning in a given community. In our research program, we have found that the value of eGranary was associated with a wide range of functions in a particular space and time, and its strengths and

limitations were best understood with reference to the key resources Warschauer (2003) has identified as necessary for meaningful use of technology. I have argued that there is a need for greater attention to issues of uptake with regard to the value of a given digital resource, and that constructs of identity and investment can contribute to studies of digital literacy in poorly resourced communities. In particular, an appreciation of students' imagined identities are important for enhancing the investments that students have in digital literacies.

An intriguing question for further research concerns the ways in which eGranary, and digital literacy more broadly, might shift perspectives of space and place amongst users in remote rural areas of the world. In our research program, we found that, in rural areas particularly, the "village" constituted the boundary of the students' worlds and the rest of the world was "outside" and "far away". In rural communities in Uganda, and no doubt many other parts of the world, word often travels by word of mouth, and people "tell others" about developments in communities they have visited. As the youth in our program gained greater access to both information and technology, they eagerly sought to shift the boundaries of their worlds, to learn more about Uganda, Africa, and the international community, and to make meaningful connections with a wider world. Digital practices thus helped to increase the range of the students' imagined identities, and their hopes for the future. Indeed, it was clear that the students were invested in digital innovations to transform both themselves and their place in the world. The implications for educational and social change are profound.

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**Chapter 9**
# What Counts as the Social in a Social Practices Approach to the Study of Children's Engagement with Electronic Media, Language and Literacy in a Context of Social Diversity?

**Mastin Prinsloo and Polo Lemphane**

## Introduction

Reading and writing are often understood, particularly in educational studies (Adams 1990; Moats 2007), as the efforts of individual minds where readers and writers are seen as more or less efficient processors and producers of texts of particular kinds. In this view, their social positioning, their background and interests, only have bearing on how successfully they are able to learn the skills involved, as if learning to read and write were in the end something like learning how to use a knife and fork. As Harris (1995, p. 6) pointed out, such approaches to literacy "treat the sign as something externally given, an object already provided by society for the learner to 'acquire' and utilize." However, we are reminded from our observations of people (children included) who make and take meaning on and through electronic media resources (laptops, mobile phones, tablets and so on) that reading and writing are always as much about social engagements of varying kinds, by way of various discourse resources, as they are about basic coding activities. Meaning does not reside autonomously in the text itself. The denotational meanings of words, images and sentences are only one aspect of a text or utterance and it is the more connotational, contextual and interactional meanings that are usually critical—for example, what is signalled by a switch to a different style or register and how such a switch is relevant to the activities and social relationships at play.

In the approach criticized by Harris, above, meaning is thought to lie autonomously in the surface features of the text, which offers up its unequivocal messages to a skilled reader. In contrast, the research that has been loosely collated under the term Literacy Studies and also often referred to as the New Literacy Studies turned to the study of reading and writing as cognitively, historically, socially, culturally and institutionally variable activities (see for example, Barton 2001; Baynham and

M. Prinsloo (✉) · P. Lemphane
University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa
e-mail: mastin.prinsloo@uct.ac.za

P. Lemphane
e-mail: pololemphane@yahoo.com

Prinsloo 2009; Barton and Hamilton 1998; Gee 1999; Pahl and Rowsell 2006, 2012; Street 1995). The Literacy Studies point has always been that the ways in which the signs and objects of writing get inserted in social actions and get produced within social activity can differ significantly, with the result that there can be differences in what these forms *do*. As Luke and Carrington (2002, p. 232) summarized it,

> it is an axiom of the New Literacy Studies that how literacy is shaped as a social practice is linked to larger social structures. How those linkages are established is in part an ethnographic and in part a discourse analytic question: pursued through local analyses of the power relations, knowledges and identities built through literacy education and everyday life.

While a strength of this Literacy Studies approach is its emphasis on attention to the goings-on of social life and how these shape particular instances of literacy engagement, this chapter addresses concerns with some key theoretical and methodological aspects of Literacy Studies in the light of research on children's early engagements with electronic media resources in South Africa. In particular, we examine the concept of literacy as social practice that has been the core theoretical resource of Literacy Studies (Barton 2001; Baynham and Prinsloo 2009; Street 1995) and ask how the theorization of practices happens with regard to the relationships between particular instances of digital literacy actions and activities and their wider social meanings. We are interested in the question of how big or how small the social appears to be in our conceptions of practices; how such large constructs as *globalization* or *the global* and 'small' constructs such as *the local* apply in digital media research with what kinds of relations with each other. The following brief data extract from a study of particular children's early experiences with digital media is indicative of these concerns, as they relate to data analysis.[1] The youths in this extract are the children of Sotho-speaking migrants from the Eastern Cape, living in a shack in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, with their parents, neither of whom was regularly employed. These children had no access to personal computers or the Internet and were allowed only limited play-time on their parents' mobile phones, in particular because prolonged play with the phone caused the battery to run down and also because their mother, at least, did not see any educational value in children's digital play. The conversation below starts to illustrate this point. The exchange is between their father, Mr. Mahlale and a visitor, Mr. Lebaka, who came to borrow a music CD. They are speaking Sesotho. The Mahlale home is a shack made from corrugated iron sheets and masonite, about 3½ by 4½ m$^2$.

1. Mr. Lebaka: This phone of yours really works! It does not have a free day
2. Mr. Mahlale: (*Softly*) It will exhaust the battery
3. Mr. Lebaka: If it is left there on the charger, and they see it … (*giggles from the children*)

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[1] The data reported on in this chapter was recorded by Polo Lemphane as part of her research for her Masters minor dissertation (Lemphane 2012) and is also reported on in Lemphane and Prinsloo (in press). The data is translated into English. All names of research participants used here are pseudonyms. This work is part of a wider research project on children's home and school literacies that is partly funded by the National Research Foundation, South Africa.

The children had taken the mobile phone off the charger when their father was not looking. The children had two strategies to get hold of one of the phones: one was to wait for a phone to be put on a charger, so that they could take it and play with it; the other was to ask visitors to their home if they could "see" their phones. When they "saw" a phone, the children played with it to see what games it had, how its recording mode worked, as well as examining the different ringing tones it had. The children's mother was even more reluctant than their father to give them access to the phones (see Lemphane 2012).

The conversation below was between Thabang, Mrs. Mahlale and the researcher:

1. Lemphane: Are you not playing with the phone today?
2. Thabang: Father's phone is not there.
3. Lemphane: Don't you use your mother's?
4. Thabang: (*Nervously*) We use it.
5. Mrs Mahlale: They know that I am not like their father. I am strict.

As Lemphane (2012) and Lemphane and Prinsloo (in press) described it, the children were never seen to make phone calls nor send SMSes. The parents' restrictions regarding children's use of mobile phones, as they protected these costly resources, gave the children limited access to digital play, in contrast with their middle class peers. Not only was their access restricted but the conditions of play were also constrained by the limited space available in their home, as well as the parents' attitudes to children's noise. When they played inside, the children often had to play silently so as not to annoy their parents or their visitors in the crowded collective space which they all occupied. The children's digital play consisted mostly of silently playing, or silently watching each other play the one available game on the cheaper and older Vodafone 150 phone, to which they had greater access than the better phone of their parents. The situational details here point us to what we call 'the social life' of digital media engagements; the ways that their uses are socially shaped and distinctive with regard to their embedded uses in particular settings. The question arises of how to make research sense of the data on children's early digital engagements when they are not in the mainstream of contemporary social life, and where their engagements are not 'successful' in the ways that are frequently identified in studies of children as 'digital natives' and rapid learners by way of electronic engagements (Gee 2008; Warschauer and Matuchniak 2010). What conceptual resources are at hand that are suited to the task of pursuing this question further?

## The Social Life of Digital Writing: Events and Practices

We arguably live in worlds where writing and writing artefacts are part of the 'glue' of social life and for very many people those resources are electronic ones. The spread of networked, electronic media have intensified the extent to which literacy, texts and their influences saturate everyday and institutional life in many settings. Secondly, these resources are used in diverging social sites, which challenge us to

account for how they are taken up and taken hold of in similar or diverging ways across settings (Prinsloo and Rowsell 2012; Prinsloo 2005; Snyder and Prinsloo 2007). Media resources, including software programmes, get interpreted and made sense of in particular contexts. The interests, histories and ways of being of the users will sometimes be different to those of the designers and programmers, who bring their own interests, assumptions and expectations to their design work. Children of migrants, such as the Mahlale children here, encounter media resources that, too, have migrated and arrive at this site with the intentions and expectations of their designers and distributors already embedded in them. How they have affect and have meaning in this new site is not a straightforward matter. Such observations turn our attention to the resources from Literacy Studies for studying literacy as situated social practices.

A methodology for the study of literacy as variable social activity emerged in the work of Literacy Studies researchers in the 1980s and 1990s, in particular, and has been widely employed since for the study of literacy and more recently for the study of digital literacies or electronic media engagements. For the Literacy Studies researcher, the social in the study of literacy as socially embedded activity is constituted by *events* and *practices*, which can be studied by way of ethnographic enquiry. This focus on events as a methodological strategy in Literacy Studies is commonly traced back to Heath's (1982, 1983) extended study of the home and school language and literacy practices of Black and White working class and middle class local communities in a southern USA region, at a time when legal desegregation was still fresh and racially integrated schooling a relatively new phenomenon. *Events* provided a resource for empirically analysing differences in ways with literacy across different social settings, Heath describing them as "the occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (Heath 1982, p. 50). She followed Hymes in insisting that what counted in effective communication was not a generalized competence (e.g., being able to "speak English" or "code and decode letters") but a situated, communicative competence. Such insights lend themselves readily to the study of electronic media communicative practices. For Heath, patterns of language and literacy use varied across local communities (and across social classes) and were consistent with other cultural practices, such as "space and time orderings, problem-solving techniques, group loyalties, and preferred patterns of recreation" (1983, p. 344). The observed instances of writing-based or writing-linked interaction were the events, which were the unit of analysis for researchers and what underlay them were the social practices. Her work, together with that of Street (1984) and Scribner and Cole (1981) pointed Literacy Studies to the ways situated, distinctive types of actions and meanings were shared by groups of people who sustain them as part of their collective social activities and how these particular "ways of knowing" and accompanying ways with words and writing were endorsed or discounted in schools, at work and in other settings. This research showed that the worlds revealed through the detailed study of writing used in particular contexts were those of social relationships, "orientations towards persons, roles, statuses, rights and duties, deference and demeanour" (Hymes 1996, p. 45), not universal

functions of writing abstractly conceived, nor of particular written language forms. Prinsloo has previously drawn on these ideas to study digital media as *placed resources* in particular social settings, on the grounds that

> what might look like the same multimedia text on screen is not functionally the same in a different setting. It follows different meaning conventions, and requires different skills for its successful use in situated social contexts for particular purposes, as part of different human activities. (for example, Prinsloo 2005, p. 90)

In this view, digital media resources operate "as artefacts and as signs that are embedded in local relations which are themselves shaped by larger social dynamics of power, status, access to resources and social mobility" (Prinsloo 2005, p. 96; see also Prinsloo and Rowsell 2012). However, the specification of how these differences are construed and have effect has been a challenging one. As one example, the relation between the social and language was formerly comfortably embedded in the sociolinguistic concept of *speech community* but that is no longer the case. Within sociolinguistics *speech community* as a key construct linking the social and linguistic has been foundational, contested and changing since Hymes (1974) first described it as key to the sociolinguistic enterprise:

> Speech Community is a necessary, primary concept … It postulates the unit of description as a social, rather than linguistic, entity. One starts with a social group and considers the entire organization of linguistic means within it. (p. 74)

However, the view of speech communities as relatively homogenous and populated by stable linguistic subjects has increasingly been challenged in recent times (De Fina and Perrino 2013). Rampton (1998, 2010) suggested that the focus in ethnographic research on a relatively small number of subjects is likely to deliver detailed accounts of an internally differentiated but coherent group and their distinctive speech practices. He offered an alternative view where community belonging could be treated as a product created in interaction, with emphasis on the part that social action plays in the production of small, new "communities." Patrick (2002, p. 593) argued that "the *speech community* should not be taken for a unit of social analysis" and that we should not assume *speech communities* "exist as predefined entities waiting to be researched, or identify them with folk notions, but see them as objects constituted anew by the researcher's gaze and the questions we ask." This concern takes us back to look again at what we mean when we talk of practices and social practices, concepts that have been foundational resources in social views of literacy and digital literacy. We are challenged to clarify what we understand as the literacy-language-social linkage, rather than to assume a functionalist relationship between concepts of language and culture.

## Social Practices in Literacy Studies

In "practices theory" (variously associated in its foundations with Wittgenstein, Bourdieu, Foucault, and others) the social is found in social practices, not, firstly, in individual minds nor in discourses nor in symbolic interactions. In this view

it is through action and interaction within practices that knowledge is constituted and social life is produced, maintained and changed. Within Literacy Studies as Street (1995) explained it, the concept of social practices has served as a resource to handle the patterns of activity around literacy actions and interactions "by linking them to something broader of a social and cultural kind, enabling the description and analysis of such events at a 'higher level of abstraction'" (p. 2). However, the specification of this "something broader" has been a challenging and contested one.

At the broadest level, practices are understood as those habits and dispositions which are acquired and not explicitly learnt or taught and which characterize our everyday interactions with things and people. The micro-skills of writing or conversational competence are often referred to as one example of how much background knowledge makes up practices, including the feel for occasion, style, register, tone, strategies of turn-taking, affirming, politeness and silence that are involved in bringing off a conversation or exchange in speech, writing or in online written or multimodal communication. Practices refer to such pivotal but taken-as-given and implicit resources of background knowhow and commitments, as well as aspects of consciousness such as intentionality and rule-following, and also of embodiment—how we are bodies in certain sorts of ways. Practices, in this view, are not based on or explicitly communicated as beliefs or rules, and they are passed on through interaction and activity. Practices are thus historical, situated and hard to pinpoint because they include elements that are both profound and trivial, stated and implicit. This raises challenges for their theorization and their use in research analysis. Nonetheless, practices have been a key resource in attempts in contemporary sociology for explaining social reproduction, or the endurance of social inequalities, in non-determinist ways. Starting from Marxist conceptions of *praxis,* practices (habits, dispositions, background knowhow) are the ways that stratified societies are reproduced, providing resources for personal identity work and social place through processes of interpellation (Althusser 1994) and embodiment (Butler 2005), that provide the resources for self-knowledge and interaction and that simultaneously make available and reproduce the major social cleavages of class, gender and race.

Following these influences, but struggling with the broadness of the concept, Literacy Studies researchers have given varying emphases to what count as practices in their research, and disagreed with each other (e.g., Luke 2004), often focusing on the everyday and, at most, only inferring political processes that lie beyond these. How 'the local' is constituted and located within larger dynamics has remained a question that has troubled this research, and has become increasingly prominent as a concern. In many contemporary urban environments around the world, not least in European cities (Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Jacquemet 2005), local communities are increasingly coming to be seen as characterized by diversity or even "superdiversity" (Vertovec 2007) in the origins, backgrounds, commitments, interests and languages spoken of their inhabitants, many of whom have migrated to these centres and bring languages and associations from elsewhere. African cities can be seen as similar sites of linguistic and social diversities, though such diversity has a longer and a different history. These are therefore not homogenous speech communities such as Hymes perhaps had in mind, nor are they spatially contained

the way that Heath's local neighbourhoods were seen to be. Social networks under these circumstances are translocal and often transnational as people maintain social relations with friends and families in other countries and regions.

## Macro and Micro in Scales Theory

The recent work of sociolinguists who use *scales theory* (Blommaert 2007, 2010; Blommaert et al. 2005; Collins et al. 2009) provides a set of conceptual resources for retheorizing social practices and for understanding the way power relations on a global scale shape the uptake of language resources in specific local contexts. Drawing on social geography and World Systems Analysis (Wallerstein 2001), along with the perspective of Bourdieu and sociolinguistic arguments on indexicality, scales theory in sociolinguistics asks how an analysis can account for the effects of large scale, for example institutional, national, transnational features, on the dynamics of face to face interaction and offers the argument that sociolinguistic and discursive phenomena are "essentially *layered*, even if they appear to be one-time, purely synchronic and unique events" (Blommaert 2007, p. 3). The scales model suggests that each context (local, regional, national, global) has its own "orders of indexicality" which assign meanings, values and statuses to diverse codes. These values or indexicalities are organized hierarchically at a global level in a world that is systemically organized in terms of scales from top to bottom. While local scales are momentary, situated and restricted, the codes and literacies of dominant groupings are valued at a translocal level because they are resilient, highly mobile and they can "jump scales" (Blommaert 2010, p. 36). Scales theory thus provides a metaphor to analyze the way language resources retain or lose social value depending on where they are placed along spatiotemporal lines within social contexts, where power relations shape the uptake of language resources. A sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert 2010) working with this model of the social as a world system pays attention to language hierarchy and processes that are seen as holding across situations and transcending localities. Children of poor or out-of-work parents might possess language and meaning-making resources but these are different to those required by the hegemonic centre and are thus devalued.

This analysis aims to account for large-scale features of language and literacy, particular, for example on institutional, national, and transnational levels, as well as their impact on the dynamics of face to face interaction (Blommaert 2007, 2010; Collins et al. 2009). Interaction between different scales is a crucial feature for understanding the socio-linguistic dimensions of such events and processes, because language and literacy practices are subject to social processes of hierarchical ordering.

The model is a social practices one in that the key concept of indexicality points to the inherently contexted nature of language within orders of normativity and secondly that such contexts are arranged systemically: Unique instances of communication point towards "social and cultural norms, genres, traditions, expectations—

phenomena of a higher scale-level" (Blommaert 2007, p. 4). Scales theory in socio-linguistics follows Bourdieu in thinking about literacy, language and the new media as carrying social capital in situated ways within specific social economies. However, the scaled model might not be an appropriate resource for making sense of the complex ways that children and youths encounter new media in situated contexts, including on the so-called social periphery, as we go on to discuss.

One of the troubling problems about conceiving of globalization as systemic and hierarchical is the in-built assumption that complexity is synchronous and scaled, that higher scales are more complex and that lower scales and peripheries are simpler forms of social organization, with developments at the "top" or the core of the world system simply having effects at the "bottom"; for example, observations that developments in the field of internet communication have effects on other, "less sophisticated" forms of literacy in the periphery. The problem with such observations is that they do not take account of how these socially constructed resources are taken hold of or refigured as placed resources and as assemblages in particular networks of association. The suggestion that sophistication is a characteristic of one site and not the other would appear to be a judgment made from "the centre", based on the assumption that sophistication (which we might read here as a synonym for complexity) is intrinsically an upper-scale phenomenon.

A telling example is Blommaert's (2010) discussion of "grassroots literacy" as constituting the normative genre employed by the mass of hardly schooled Africans, a writing practice he says is characterized by "heterography"—the deployment of graphic symbols in ways that defy orthographic norms: words are spelled in different ways, often reflecting the way they are pronounced in spoken vernacular varieties rather than following conventional orthographic norms or prestige language forms. Blommaert also finds an uncertainty about linguistic and stylistic rules, as well as a common use of drawing as well as writing. Examined from beyond the local, these texts appear as inferior examples of writing, pointing to the low status of these persons on a larger stage. What is lacking in this perspective for us, however, is attention to the various purposes, interactions and activities that might be variously served by the variety of social activities of which particular pieces of writing are a part. Complexity and specificity get lost in this approach, and it can be said that "grassroots literacy" works best as a concept when instances of writing are viewed in relation to how they are seen from "a higher level". But such a perspective loses touch with the complexity of the located and specific. Close up, the picture is different, both more specific, more complex, more varied and more diverse than scales theory would suggest.

An alternative view to the systemically ordered account of globalization presented in scales theory is that presented through the idea of *global forms* and *global assemblages* in sociology, as an alternative to the categories of local and global (Collier 2006). Global forms are widely distributed conceptual and organizational resources that are assembled and adapted in distinctive ways at local and regional levels so as to work in those contexts, articulated in specific situations—or territorialised in *assemblages,* or as placed resources. These assemblages define new material, collective and discursive relationships. Global forms, such as those that

might be diseminated electronically, interact with other resources and elements in particular contexts, in contingent, uneasy, unstable interrelationships. In the space of assemblage, a global form is simply one among a range of elements. An assemblage is the product of multiple determinations that are not predictable by a single logic. These interactions might be called the *actual* global, or the global in the space of assemblage. The assemblage is not a "locality" to which broader forces from the global are counterposed. Nor is it the structual effect of such forces (Collier 2006, p. 380). The term *global assemblage* suggests inherent tensions, forms that are shifting, in formation, or at stake, heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial and situated. Such an orientation argues against the macro/micro conceptual frame of scales theory, or at least suggests that we attend to multiple scales with no single scale treated as foundational or determinant. Thus we can look at how youths and electronic resources position each other by drawing on both widely circulating sociohistorical constructs as well as locally developed constructs of value, status and identity. What such an orientation leads to is a concern less with grand theorising but with small and focused research into the *actual* global in particular settings. In illustration, we turn back to the children in Khayelitsha as they talk while one of them plays a game on their parents cellphone. They share a desire for a "Playstation".

1. Thato: Some children take PlayStation to school and play with it
2. Thabang: You are lying
3. Nthabiseng: No Mputi
4. Thabang: It is connected to a TV
5. Thabang: How much is PlayStation?
6. Thato: Ninety rand
7. Thabang: Where?
8. Thato: There at the Chinese shop
9. Nthabiseng: At the Chinese shop
10. Thabang*:* Yes, in order to play it, it needs many things, it needs to be connected to a TV. When someone needs to play, make him/her pay and make money
11. Nthabiseng: You buy fat cakes
12. Thabang: For electricity which they play with
13. Nthabiseng: No, I buy pirates T-shirt
14. Thabang: Anyone who wants to play, plays the PlayStation for one rand
15. Nthabiseng: Yes, they will enter with one rand
16. Thabang: Because electricity
17. Nthabiseng: Yes, electricity is expended; you have to enter with one rand

This extract offers us a provocative example of children's situated engagement with digital media artefacts. "PlayStations" as objects of desire are not part of their parents' frame of reference at all so their discussion is not framed by inherited practices or orientations. Why do they talk of these resources and artefacts in the way that they do and what does this signal? Firstly, they imagine them as resources in terms of their *exchange* value rather than their *use* value, contrary to what one might be inclined to expect. They also imagine them as collective resources, likely to be

distributed in their use across children in their neighbourhood. There are clear differences here as to what one might see middle-class children saying and doing with these digital 'writing' resources, and again, the question is how we as researchers interpret these differences and what we make of them.

What the children have to say about the PlayStation could be taken as an indicator that they have no real sense of how they would play with it, as they quickly turn to invoking more familiar desires—having fatcakes and getting a Pirates T-shirt. But the PlayStation, it turns out, is more accessible than it might have seemed to be and is not what the reader might first take it to be. What they have in mind is actually a cheaper, more limited electronic toy with only a few basic games on it that is sold locally, costing only R90 (US$ 9) at the local "Chinese shop" in the shack settlement, where immigrant Chinese merchants sell cheaply-made low cost versions of all sorts of items and goods. In this version of globalization, the "PlayStation" is not that far out of reach. The children already have a TV in their house, one of a few in the neighbourhood, frequently used as a common resource by their neighbours, mostly for watching one religious video, in particular, in a crowded, collective and vocal room (Lemphane 2012). The children's imagining of their sharing of the PlayStation with their friends draws from this familiar activity of collective and active participation in media entertainment. Lastly, their sense that the PlayStation could be a potential money-making artefact reflects their wider environmental location: In a neighbourhood where few people have reliable income sources and everything that has value is considered tradeable, they draw from these influences in identifying the PlayStation as a tradeable resource. These details are about a complexity that is specific and assembled in particular kinds of ways in a mix of global constructs and more localized discourses and preoccupations. A practices approach that looks up to study youths' engagement with digital media in these contexts as a scaled activity loses touch with the heteroglossia (Bailey 2007) and specificity of the *actual global* and the sometimes unexpected nature of localized connections to other places and practices that we see here. We must expect the mobile global resources of language, literacy and digital media to be distributed, assembled and adapted in distinctive ways in particular contexts, where they are assembled along with locally developed categories, values and activities, in shifting and often unpredictable combinations.

## Implications of These Contrasting Conceptual Orientations

A review of how such a perspective translates into research in literacy and digital media in schooling might be helpful at this point, and we turn to relevant research that follows both a scales theory approach and to contrasting orientations like the one we have outlined here.

An alarming aspect of South African schooling is the huge gap between the small number of schools where students from middle-class homes are doing well, going on to university study, on the one hand, and the large majority of schools, on the

other, where pass rates and school completions rates are very low indeed. Comparative analyses of national test results in reading and maths for Grades 1 to 6 show around 20% of students excelling and 80% doing very badly indeed (Taylor 2011, p. 12), as if there were two separate schooling systems operating within the public schooling system, one for the children of the elite and the other for the large majority of students. This situation is of great concern in a country that is dealing with the legacies of racialized inequalities as well as various kinds of skills shortages.

A number of studies have addressed this question and we focus here on the contrast between an approach that brings the idea of 'scale' to the study of literacy across diverse settings (Blommaert et al. 2006; Blommaert 2010), on the one hand, and research that is critical of this approach. The scales theory approach to literacy studies as we have described it, suggests that language and literacy practices are subject to social processes of hierarchical ordering. "Societies marked by deep inequality characteristically produce different layers and niches in which very different ways of life are developed on the basis of rules, norms and opportunities not valid elsewhere" (Blommaert et al. 2006, p. 378). In their study, carried out at a Cape Town township school they identified students' writing as featuring grammatical, spelling and other deviations that characterize "grassroots literacy" and found the same features in teachers' writing, evidence of what he calls "peripheral normativity." Suresh Canagarajah has since carried out a study of his own in a similarly poorly resourced Western Cape township school setting to that of Blommaert and colleagues and he has disagreed with aspects of Blommaert et al. (2006) analysis (Canagarajah in press). Canagarajah disagrees with Blommaert et al. treatment of literacy and language regimes as somewhat autonomous and separate, with their own logic, cut off from others. He argues that while particular communities might display characteristic writing forms, they are not necessarily "stuck" or "locked" at "one scale–level" in the way suggest by the use of scale theory in the Blommaert et al. analysis. Canagarajah's own study finds in the texts of the students a *recognition* of different norms at different scale values. In their writings on a school Facebook site, students' heterography is evident in their mixing of English and isiXhosa, abbreviations and icons. He identifies their writing here as a hybrid form of literacy activity, combining oral and literate resources and diverse languages. In their classroom written work, however, students don't mix codes in the same way and Canagarajah suggests they have shifted to a translocal norm, approximating to Standard Written English and with an emerging sense of the genre requirements of school essay writing. While student writing displays the types of grammatical problems that Blommaert identified, Canagarajah sees teachers as selectively correcting these as they move students to the developing of their translocal English-language writing resources, from a constrained starting point. He argues that it might be more productive to see social spaces as *contact zones* than as separated ones, with diverse semiotic resources in the same social space. Much depends, he says, on how people negotiate these mobile resources.

A view of practices which stresses a global logic appears to be both necessary and problematic in that such an approach sometimes finds it hard to pin down heterogeneous people, things and processes in a non-reductionist way. Featherstone

(2006) points to the indeterminacies that follow, paradoxically, from the concept of globalization as a socio-economic, political and cultural phenomenon of the contemporary world. He suggests that "the management of uncertainty, task predictability and orderly performances were much easier to facilitate in the 'relatively complex' organizations of modern industrial societies" (p. 391). A global society, on the other hand, he writes "entails a different form of complexity: one emanating more from microstructural arrangements that institute self-organizing principles and patterns" (p. 391). Wortham (2013) and Wortham and Rhodes (2013) offer an approach to the study of language, literacy and educational processes which rejects the macro/micro framework which attends to multiple scales with no single scale treated as foundational or determinant. Wortham shows how students and teachers position each other and construct identities that draw upon widely circulating sociohistorical models as well as locally developed categories of identity, and the curriculum itself. Wortham and Rhodes' study of one migrant girl shows her, her family and other actors combining heterogeneous resources in contingent ways, as she navigates an emergent literacy identity for herself. The *actual* global, in this view, is only apparent from focused research in particular settings that shows the creative or contingent reworking of received goods—language, literacy and socially available identity resources, in school contexts and outside of those.

Such arguments draw our attention to the ways that events and practices, as we discussed them earlier in this chapter, fit a macro-micro paradigm "with typical events supporting generalizations about the macro and interactional work exemplifying the micro" (Wortham 2013, p. 128), whereas, Wortham suggests, we need to look beyond the speech or literacy event, "studying the cross-event chains or trajectories required to explain social identification, cultural change, and ontogenesis (Agha and Wortham 2005)" (p. 129). He cautions that the researcher needs to pay attention to more than microlevel contexts of use because of the ways that social relationships are signalled by language and literacy use. Local contexts are not intelligible in themselves. But such research needs also to attend to the emergence of contingent and unexpected models, behaviours, and ways of relating.

Through the engaged work of Literacy Studies researchers over several decades (see Prinsloo and Baynham 2013) we have learnt to see school literacies as particular versions of socioculturally embedded activities and as socio-political, or ideological activities. Print literacy as an idea and an activity continues to rely on the interactive dynamics between teachers and students in schools within particular schooling systems to produce particular ways with writing. As Cook-Gumperz (2006, p. 4) showed, it is through the processes of "classroom exchanges, learning-group formation, through informal judgments and standardized tests and all the other evaluative apparatus of schooling that a *schooled literacy* is formed". Children's and youths' digital literacy activities, however, raise new challenges. It would be hard to argue that schools are the gateway to digital literacies and technologies in anything like the way they have been access routes to respected forms of print literacy (Sefton-Green et al. 2009, p. 109). A distinctive feature of the digital literacy activities of children and youths is their "bottom-up" nature, in that young people tend to gain most of their experiences and knowledge in relating to digital technologies outside the for-

mal institutions of knowledge building. In the case of digital literacies, schooling has far less symbolic and actual control on their acquisition and use than has been the case with print literacies. Our brief engagement with children's engagements with digital media in Khayelitsha makes the point that researchers should be careful not to rush to judgment as to what pattern these 'bottom-up' processes follow across different contexts, nor what their consequences might be.

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# Chapter 10
# Shack Video Halls in Uganda as Youth Community/Literacy Learning and Cultural Interaction Sites

**George Ladaah Openjuru and Stella Achen**

## Introduction

Uganda is one of the five East African Countries, the other four being Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania and Kenya. It is a landlocked country surrounded by South Sudan  in the North, The Democratic Republic of Congo in the West, Tanzania in the South, and Kenya in the East. Uganda is a multilingual country with over 40 different languages. It is also a country where the use of Kiswahili is limited compared to all the other East African countries and English is the predominant language used for government business and daily life.

## *English and Education in Uganda*

English is mostly learnt while at school and there are very limited or no formal arrangements for learning English outside of schools in Uganda. This is because English is the language of instruction (LOI) in Ugandan schools. However, a new policy has been put in place for the use of local language in the initial three years of primary school education, although the question of choice of local language is still a problem in some multilingual areas with both minority and majority populations (Ward et al. 2006). After the first three years of primary school education, the language of instruction changes to English and local language is studied as a subject. This continuous use of English for most of a person's school life is the only opportunity that a person has to gain English fluency. Those who are not able to stay in school long enough have no other opportunity to gain such proficiency in both spoken and written English communication. This means people who drop out of school

G. L. Openjuru (✉) · S. Achen
Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda
e-mail: george.openjuru@gmail.com

S. Achen
e-mail: sachen@iace.mak.ac.ug

in the early years are not able to speak or understand information or representations in the form of text, audio and visual media that are in English.

According to Kagolo (2012, 10 Nov), quoting a 2010 UN Educational Report, Uganda at 29 % primary school completion rate has the lowest number of children staying in school up to Primary 7 compared to Kenya at 84 %, Tanzania at 81 %, Rwanda at 74 %. While this problem is more significant in rural areas, urban youth are also affected. Therefore, the use of English as a language of instruction in education can also be seen in a symbolic way as representing the school system as a foreign cultural/social institution that is not consistent with the general way of life at the family or household levels, especially poor households, from which the early school leavers normally originate. This irrelevant curriculum that is not consistent with the needs of the society in terms of content and methods of delivery are manifestations of lack of local context in the school systems. In effect, children do not enjoy being in school since it is largely inconsistent with their ways of being at home in terms of language and discourse. This incongruence and many other factors explain the low enrolment and high dropout rates of over 71 % from the educational systems (Nakanyike et al. 2003).

Overall one third of youth (32.2 %) are not therefore able to read and write (Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development 2001). These are youths not engaging with the dominant reading and writing practices that are promoted through the school system (Moje et al. 2000). Consequently, these youth require a different educational set up, one that resonates well with their interests and worldview. Unfortunately, such facilities for this category of youth are not available (Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development 2001). Consequently there are many youth who are out of school and out of work. It is therefore important to seek more innovative literacy learning methods that appeal to them.

In this chapter, we focus on videos that are screened in shack video halls in Uganda to understand the literacy learning and cultural interaction opportunities that these video halls present. As with educational films, presented through video and television, there is a need to pay attention to the cultural accessibility of the presentation. The most interesting aspect of the video screenings is the active engagement, including intervention with the foreign video production, to make it locally meaningful. This is due to the fact that, "different social groups have different ways of cultural appreciation" (Achen and Openjuru 2012, p. 4). Educational films should therefore be culturally appropriate for low income youth in urban slum areas so as to make them accessible and attractive to the group in their learning venues and style of learning. Such films can be enhanced with sub-scripts written in the local language to encourage the matching or linking of meaning from audio (voice) and written texts.

## *Youth in Uganda*

In this study, we adopt Kerka's (2006) definition of out of school youth as the youth who drop out from school in Advanced Level (senior six) and below. They leave school for many reasons such as boredom with the school system, family problems,

early pregnancy, delinquency, and escaping intolerable home situations. In addition to the 'drop out,' the following youth categories are also described as being 'out-of-school youth' and 'out-of-work': child mothers who have completed their high school or tertiary education and are without jobs; homeless youth; young adults who are also unemployed people with limited English language skills; and all youth who are not employed and are not in higher education.

The majority of the out-of-school youth, because of their poor educational background, cannot find formal gainful employment easily and they are thus described as out-of-work youth as well. Since they have not stayed in school long enough to gain English language proficiency, they are therefore not able to write or speak English and they prefer to use their local ethnic language, for example, Luganda in Kampala. For this reason, many out-of-school and out-of-work youth enjoy interpreted movies that are shown in shack video halls (Achen and Openjuru 2012). Some of these youth grow up without close parental guidance or supervision (e.g., street kids). They earn petty incomes through doing odd manual jobs such as lifting luggage for people who come to buy or sell in the market for a fee, or begging on the street. Some of these youth are children of poor single mothers and urban parents who cannot afford to keep their children in schools. These categories of youth are in desperate need of livelihood skills.

The Vee-Jays are youth who develop the capacity to intervene and recreate movie stories to make it suit their local context and discourse (Achen and Openjuru 2012). Such intervention has been made easy through the proliferation of digital recording systems that enable voice over recording, script insertion and duplication. This process of interpreting movies is called "*enjogere*." The youth who engage in interpreting movies are called Video Jockeys. However, they are popularly known by their short form as "Vee-Jays" or "VJs" (Marshfield and Oosterhout 2007). They help other youth who have not stayed in school long enough to develop English language proficiency to learn from the entertaining movies in addition to getting exposed to existence beyond their slum home confines.

To conclude this introduction, we would like to say, this chapter presents an understanding of literacy as an alternative and more inclusive educational provision, which is hoped to be workable in the developing world, focusing particularly on Ugandan youth and their experience and access to media literacy. School based literacies are not very successful in the developing world, especially among both the urban and rural poor. Particularly the question of a more culturally inclusive and relevant curriculum and method of delivery is a question that is of primary concern in Africa, especially in the cascading of alternative literacy skills in the community.

## The Shack Video Halls as Learning Centres

Given the attraction to the shack video halls brought about by the innovative intervention of the Vee-Jays, these Shack video halls could be used as learning centres for out-of-school and out-of-work youth. This is because the learning would be

self-motivated and set by the Vee-Jays' skills within the relevant and meaningful context and culture of the youth themselves. In this way the youth are able to become integrated into media literacy in ways that help them have an appreciation of the dominant foreign cultural practices that are purveyed in English and in the dominant literacy practices that control the resource distribution of secondary 'discourse' (Gee 1990). This 'discourse' is for now only propagated through the school systems.

Interestingly, educational researchers in Africa and Uganda in particular have not yet given much attention to investigating and understanding the educational or learning potentials of the video halls, movies, electronic, and other media technologies beyond using them for delivering content in the traditional classroom setting. In our view, the video halls are very rich information sharing or access points for youth. These movies and other electronic media have manifestations of what is increasingly being dubbed as popular culture among youth (Goodman 2003). This interest provides huge educational potential. Unfortunately, educational institutions such as schools have failed to acknowledge the potential of these developments or take advantage of them in teaching youth literacies.

## Theory of Literacy, Media Literacy and Critical Pedagogy

According to Rogers (2002), the word literacy is "frequently used as a metaphor, as in computer literacy, environmental literacy, legal literacy etc." (p. 3). Yet to Rogers, literacy means working with written information, words, or text on a variety of surfaces such as computer screen, paper, walls, blackboard and whiteboard, the back of your hand, overhead projector slides, and video films. Rogers accepts being uncomfortable with other uses of the term literacy but is willing to accept "'visual literacy' in the sense of 'reading' (making sense of) signs, symbols and pictures on a variety of surfaces" (p. 3). However, literacy in the modern age is taking new forms, and in these new forms it is blurring the demarcations that exist between being able to read and write in the traditional mode dominated by the alphabet. New definitions and theories of literacy are emerging and taking centre stage. These include Street's (1984, 1995, 1996) formulation of literacy as social practice, which recognises context relevant literacy practices and thus context relevant literacy learning. Sometimes these are referred to as the New Literacy Studies (Kim 2003). Rogers (2002) also acknowledges some of these in his acceptance of videos and pictures or images. Scholars like Goodman (2003) have noted these developments and have observed that the dominant medium is changing. Therefore, while learning to read and write is still very important, it is now not "sufficient in a world where television, radio, movies, videos, magazine, and internet have become powerful and persuasive sites for public education and literacy" (Goodman 2003, p. 4). Goodman notes further that the most dominant images or pictures form of language now is images. Images come in the form of still and moving on mobile hand held phones, video screens, and television; together they

constitute popular youth cultures. These are the new forms of literacy, which are overtaking literacy as printed words on paper. Kress similarly states:

> Two distinct yet related factors deserve to be particularly highlighted. These are, on the one hand, the broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and, on the other hand, the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen. These two together are producing a revolution in the uses and effects of literacy and of associated means for representing and communicating at every level and in every domain. Together they raise two questions: what is the likely future of literacy, and what are the likely larger- level social and cultural effects of that change? (2003, p. 1)

These new forms of literacy communicate messages in several genres. Again Goodman (2003) identified these genres as those that are persuasive, like commercials, and those that are narrative, such as movies. In all these genres, Goodman argues, the "storytellers make countless decisions throughout the media production process, each of which plays a role in shaping the meaning a particular audience makes out of what they listen to and watch" (p. 5). Goodman adds that it is important to recognise that the audience actively interprets and understands the media story differently. They often come up with their own meanings, which are normally not the same as those of the storyteller (Achen and Openjuru 2012). Goodman (2003) and Aufderheide (1993) called this "media literacy," which is a movement designed to help in understanding, producing, and negotiating meanings in a culture of images, words, and sounds. Rogers (2002) called it "Visual Literacy". According to this chapter, this is the literacy that youth enjoy as they engage with gadgets and screens, and they learn from these interactions and technologies in styles and patterns that are relevant to the ways that are motivating to them. Youth learn when they are actively engaging with ideas and stories and coming up with their own interpretations and understandings, which may be completely different from that of the storytellers (Achen and Openjuru 2012; Goodman 2003). This view naturally takes a critical perspective to media production which then calls for "critical literacy" (Goodman 2003).

The work we report on here is in the area of media literacy, which is defined "as a set of skills that anyone can learn. Just as literacy is the ability to read and write, media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create media messages of all kinds" (Media Literacy Project, 1993, p. 1). This is similar to the Commission of the European Communities' (2007) definition, which argues that media literacy is the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communications in a variety of contexts.

It has long been acknowledged that media literacies include meaning-making with "films, CD-ROM, the internet, popular music and, television, magazines and newspapers…" (Moje et al. 2000, p. 402). Media messages are informational and creative content included in texts, sounds, and images carried by different forms of communication devices, including television, cinema, video, websites, video games and virtual communities (Commission of the European Communities 2007).

This chapter uses multiple but overlapping theoretical and conceptual perspectives that accommodate the literacy perceptions described earlier. We draw on social practices of literacy theory, which claims that social context and cultural diversity significantly affects literacy processes and meaning-making, involving an ongoing negotiation and contestation of meanings (Street 1984, 1996). In that sense, literacy must then be of a critical nature in that textual or visual meanings are not always the same between writer and reader or producers and viewer depending on their different contexts and the prevailing culture in that particular context. This perspective calls for the teaching of critical literacy, which can only be socially developed through critical pedagogy (Morrell 2002) and social constructivism (Au 1998).

Critical literacy is the ability to read texts, including motion pictures. It is about being conscious and reflective to the power, inequality, and injustices that are portrayed as normal in all media, text, and motion picture. In critical literacy, text is the "vehicle through which individuals communicate with one another using the codes and conventions of society" (Robinson and Robinson 2003, p. 3). Songs, motion pictures/movies, conversations, and photographs are all considered text. Teaching critical literacy will enable youth to engage with the information they encounter with a critical perspective. This critical perspective offers the capacity to deconstruct the power relations that are embedded in the media communication they are interacting with. Additionally, it enables youth to interrogate social issues in the society, the family, and the institutions that control their everyday lives and uncover the underlying messages that are passed on as normal (Coffey 2010).

The social practice theory of literacy necessitate taking a critical perspective that is in tandem to critical literacy and, as Norton (2007) points out, it is now increasingly recognised, "that literacy is not just a skill to be learnt but also a practice that is socially constructed and locally negotiated" (p. 6) and it can only be better understood in the context of institutional practices—be it in the home, school, community, or the larger society. The concept of critical literacy leads to a consideration of critical pedagogy, which can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and content with oppressive practices. Critical pedagogy facilitates the development of critical literacy among poor youth who frequent video halls instead of going to school (Morrell 2002). This type of pedagogy helps youth acquire the skills of critical literacy that enable them to engage with the videos that they watch on a daily basis and deconstruct the cultural practices that they would like to identify with from such information outlets. In this way they will be able to learn about the world in a manner that could help them change their personal worldview and also possibly change the world they live in.

The theory of social constructivism also argues for more inclusive educational practices in the developing world. From this perspective, failure in literacy learning is a collaborative social influence of the school systems, communities, teachers, students, and families (Au 1998). Au argues that literacy learning should be approached by moving away from the mainstream orientation to an orientation that gives greater consideration to issues of local identity and contextually and socially relevant meanings. Such a move away from mainstream understanding supports youth literacy learning through increased media engagement. This enables them

to start from what they know or are comfortable with before moving to the new and unfamiliar literacy practices in other literacy domains. Social constructivists see everyday life and meaning as continually co-created in lived social processes. People's every experience defines their lived reality, which in turn provides them with the context-specific meanings that are relevant for understanding in their own world. In this perspective, learning becomes meaningful and rewarding and not a burdensome engagement for out-of-school youth.

For any learning engagement to be effective, the learning content must be made to fit with the learners' interests and resources for meaning making. Where that is not possible, like in formal schools, learners have the tendency to drop out of such systems because the education system is not consistent with their ways of being and need for understanding. The popularity of and attraction to the interpreted movies among the low income out-of-school and out-of-work youth confirms the importance of message/content presentation and meaning-making congruence in any learning arrangement. We have noted that the Vee-Jays have exploited this potential to enhance the sales of their videotapes and to increase audience visits to their shack video halls. We noted too that in this arrangement, Vee-Jays wield a lot of potential as meaningful literacy learning facilitators in the community and their video hall experience serves as useful community learning, and cultural interaction and construction site. It is in this light that we studied shack video halls as informal learning sites for youth in Uganda. Very often, youth and children are the people most exposed to media, including television, the Internet, and computing tools, movies and videogames. Therefore manipulating, using and creating information by using these communication information technologies is of growing importance to all knowledge workers (Koltay 2011).

## Methodology

This study started as a way of understanding the Vee-Jay practice of commenting on English Hollywood movies for local youth's consumption in Shack Video Halls in Uganda. In this study we used ethnographic audience study, which is an aspect of ethnographic research (Achen and Openjuru 2012). We borrowed ideas from a similar study of television audience conducted by Tager (1997) in Durban, South Africa. Tager's focus was on audience understanding of "*The Bold and the Beautiful*" among the local urban black viewers in KwaZulu-Natal. Tager explains ethnographic audience research as an audience response study. This (audience response study) is a theory that explains that audiences are active recipients or users of communication. The theory recognises that, "Audiences are plural in their decoding, [and in] their understanding and interpretation of movies." In doing this they are helped largely by their local cultural context, which helps them to draw their own meanings from whatever they are watching. This theory is a refutation of an older theory, which sees audience as passive recipient of visual information, and that motion pictures provide the same meaning to all audience regardless of context

(Livingstone 1998, see also Achen and Openjuru 2012). This audience response theory is consistent with the social practice theory of literacy that also advocates for the context-specific understanding of literacy as discussed earlier (Street 1984).

In our case, we treat the interpreter intervention as an audience response or reaction to Hollywood movies in Uganda. In this chapter we are taking a look at this research from a different angle, which is the educational potential of the shack video hall and the Vee-Jay as facilitators of media literacy learning for youth. According to Brown, ethnographic audience research, "assumes that audiences use and interact with television and other popular forms of entertainment in a variety of ways depending on intercultural, social, class, race, and age variables" (1994, p. 73 cited in Tager 1997, p. 97). Ethnographic research refers to forms of social research with a strong emphasis on examining the nature of a social phenomenon, and not setting out to test hypotheses (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994).

According to Morley (1992, p. 183), "the aim of ethnographic audience studies is to examine the dynamics of the actions and constraints in the daily activities and practices of the individuals and groups who are engaged in the socially situated production and consumption of meanings…" (as cited in Tager 1997, p. 99).

Citing Fiske (1994), Tager explains further that ethnographic audience study takes into account the difference between people despite their social context. This theory rejects theories that are based on the singularity of meanings from television viewing (Tager 1997).

This ethnographic audience research was carried out using participant observations leading to in-depth descriptions of events, unstructured conversational in-depth interviews (Openjuru 2008), and a literature review on interpreted movies and shack video halls in Uganda. The review included watching (or review of) some of the most popular interpreted movies in Uganda, such as "The Forbidden Kingdom" featuring Jet Li and Jackie Chan to assess its educational value to youth (Fusco and Minkoff 2008).

We became observer-participants as we watched and interacted with the different youths and a Vee-Jay (VJ Kin). We also visited a number of local shanty cinema halls, called *Bibanda,* to experience watching the interpreted movies and to get an insider view of these cinema halls. We concentrated on two shanties' *Bibanda* cinema halls, which we noticed were frequented by many young people. We did not try to compare the meaning provided by the Vee-Jays' interpretation in relation to the actual meaning being portrayed by the producers. We call this the tripartite study of the youth, the Vee-Jay, and the movie.


## Where the Worlds Meet

In this section we look at how the youth, the Vee-Jay and the movie come together in a cultural interaction/mixing process in the Shack Video Halls in Kampala Uganda.

## *The Vee-Jays, Video-Jockeys or VJ*

The Vee-Jays are the movie interpreters/translators. They do this in two ways, first-ly, through what they call live shows. Live shows, according to VJ Kin, is where the Vee-Jay is invited to translate and interpret the movies while it is going on or being viewed by the audience (like TV or radio live commentators). The Vee-Jays are paid 300,000 Ugandan Shillings per hour of performance in live shows (about US $ 120). This shows that there is instant income to be earned through involve-ment in movie interpretation. The second type of interpretation is done in small dingy recording studios.

According to VJ Kin, "a Vee-Jay must be a person who is educated at least up to the level of senior six Level Certificate in Uganda" (Interview, 26 Oct 2012). Senior six is 13 years of education after pre-school, a level at which a person has gained a command of the English language sufficient to comprehend English and also to be able to translate some words and make interpretations of movies that are in English. However, only attaining an advanced level certificate is not sufficient for one to become a Vee-Jay. According to VJ Kin, for someone to become a Vee-Jay, he or she must, in his words "get experience from someone who knows interpreting or has stayed in the business for a long time" (Interview 24 Feb 2013). This means that entry into the movie interpretation business requires a period of mentorship during which the mentee is expected to gain some skills of interpreting movies. The skills, as VJ Kin explains, require a person to be able to "interpret the inner part" of the movie and not word-for-word translation. The Vee-Jay should be able to "see the importance of the action" and explain it to the audience using "the words they know," that is, words whose meanings are accessible or clear to the audience. Again, VJ Kin says, they should be able to dig out, in his words, "the deeper mean-ing" of the actions.

To be able to get the meaning of the movie and be able to explain it, Vee-Jay Kin says, "They take time to watch the movie over and over again." They watch it many times until they understand it. They also read the sub-scripts carefully and/or create their own easy-to-understand sub-scripts in the process. This is a process of trying to make sense of the two worlds—that of the original movie producers and at the same time figuring out how the local representation should be made for the local audience. The initial process of taking time to watch the movie over and over again is that of trying to draw relevant meaning from the movies by listening to what is being said by the actors and watching very carefully what they are doing. A com-bination of the two gives them the opportunity to internalise the movie to the level that helps them to integrate it with their local resources (knowledge of local context, language use, and culture) for meaning-making to explain it to their audience in a context-relevant manner. It is also noteworthy that in the process of contextualising the movie they also gain access to a foreign meaning-making practice/discourse within which the film was constructed and learn from it as well.

The skilled and experienced Vee-Jays set up their interpretation studios using the following equipment, which VJ Kin described as a mixer, microphone super, DVD

player, DVD recorder, and a computer with TV-card for capturing pictures, and display video or television screens. This requires an expenditure of about 2.5 million Ugandan Shillings for the whole set (about US $ 1000). This equipment is set up in small dingy studios. Fig. 10.1 above shows VJ Kin at work in his recording studio. This studio is very different from the one visited on 24 February 2013 as it is set in a much more organised place.

Silence is emphasised during the recording process of listening/watching and translation/interpreting concurrently. This silence is meant to achieve quality voice-over recording without background noise interference. The studio visited in Kampala City was partitioned with plywood and packed with busy young men and women with head earpieces talking Luganda into the recording microphone while watching the movie being translated and interpreted from English to Luganda (observation 24 Feb 2013). They did not allow photos to be taken of their workspace.

The Vee-Jays use their language skills and cultural knowledge to earn a living. They buy English movies and they spend time interpreting the movie using voice-over recording equipment. They then sell the interpreted movies through the different movie-selling outlets in town or the youthful street movie hawkers. They also distribute the movies to video halls that play them to their clients, who are also predominantly youth. Vee-Jays also write introductory statements on the movies using graphic design software. This writing normally advertises their movie film outlets. They can also write advertisements on the movies for some business people who would like to promote their sales. They are paid for this service separately. The people who watch or buy these translated movies receive the advertisements as part of the movie.

The Vee-Jays' translation and interpretation helps out-of school and out-of-work youth with limited English language skills to access English language movies. This exposure enables them to understand and learn from the English movies the different cultural practices on which these movies are based. The Vee-Jays who interpret are like facilitators who offer both access and meaning-making through their mediating

role. First, they make the movies understandable in the local context by translating and interpreting the movies into Luganda, the local language widely spoken in Kampala. Additionally they make the movies culturally and contextually relevant to youth who are attracted to these video halls to watch the interpreted Hollywood movies. Their interpretation involves aspects like substitution of place names in the movie with local names and the use of local storytelling style mixed with local youth slang, for example "*Mugaga uno*" meaning 'that rich man'. The names of the actors are also replaced with descriptive local names and their actions are described in a manner relevant to the daily experiences of the youth who attend. These interpreted movies excite and inspire youth in Uganda. Those who live in rural and urban areas are equally excited by these video movies, which are commonly shown in shack video halls. Below we provide two examples of interpretation; in the first, the Vee-Jay was only explaining the actions and not the actual words spoken and in the second, both words and actions in the film are translated. Below is an extract of the Vee-Jay's interpretation of the action in the introduction of the film *Forbidden Kingdom* (Fusco and Minkoff 2008, see also Achen and Openjuru 2012, p. 370–372).

> *The Forbidden Kingdom*
> Lion's Gate has brought this movie.
> To begin with Lions Gate and Casey Silver productions have brought this movie.
> Got from Majestic plaza as usual.
> Rob Minkoff is the owner of the film.
> The film is called the Forbidden Kingdom.
> That is what we are on.
> It is the kingdom we are going to explore.
> In the beginning there was up on the hill a man playing with his stuff and he was a tough man, he is like a monkey.
> They came and attacked him.
> My friends look at trouble! They have provoked him and he fights off all of them from up the hill.
> Actually! "Kumbe!" there was someone dreaming about the scene. He had seen everything. As he woke up, the T.V was playing a movie KUNG-FU.
> He has collected many posters; he is a KUNG-FU maniac.
> He is more interesting than anyone else he has collected all kinds of posters.
> Look at trouble—Collin Chaou, Liu Yifei, Li Bing Bing and Michael Angarano are on the posters he has collected and are in the movie.
> He has posters of all colours. He has watched many movies about KUNG-FU.
> He watches these films until he feels sleepy and as soon as he wakes up. In the morning; he begins from where he stopped.

In the excerpt below, the Vee-Jay is interpreting the actual words and action simultaneously.

| Words actually said in the film | Vee-Jay's interpretation |
| --- | --- |
| *Jason Tripitikas: How long has he been imprisoned?* | *It's for a long time now and it's you who has returned to give him the stuff.* |
| *Lu Yan: Five hundred years, give or take a few decades. They say when the Monkey King is free, Jed Emperor will return.* | *He has spent time there now. It's said that, if the Monkey King is free even the Emperor will return.* |
| *Jason: I don't want to free the Monkey King, I want to go home.* | *The boy said, I need to get home, I cannot free the Monkey King.* |

| Words actually said in the film | Vee-Jay's interpretation |
|---|---|
| *Lu Yan: Innkeeper, more wine.* | |
| *Jason: Haven't you had one too many?* | *The boy continued and asked, 'Don't you* |
| *Lu Yan: Wine is my inspiration, in some areas.* | *think you have had enough wine?'* |
| | *What you see actually is what adds my* |
| | *strength.* |
| | *He takes the bill to free himself.* |
| *I'm known as a poet. In some areas, I'm known* | *You know, I am also known as a beggar.* |
| *as a beggar.* | *Then he passed the bill to the boy.* |
| *Lu Yan: When I was your age, I was a scholar-* | |
| *warrior in training. My arrow was good, so too* | |
| *my Kung Fu. I was chosen to take the several* | |
| *examinations. To pass would place me among* | |
| *a short line of scholar immortals. I failed.* | |
| *Jason: You're not immortal?* | |
| *Lu Yan: If one does not attach himself to people* | *In a way he had helped this boy Jason. Jason* |
| *and desires, never shall his heart be broken….* | *was feeling sorrows of all kinds.* |
| *But then, does he ever truly live? I'd rather die* | *He had seen him becoming pale. Then he* |
| *a mortal, with a care for someone, than to live* | *says that he will die as a mortal because it* |
| *free as an immortal from his death.* | *seems everything had changed.* |
| *Jason: I don't want to lose you.* | |
| *Lu Yan: Forget about me.* | |
| *Lu Yan: It is said that master and student walk* | *He said that it's said a master and his student* |
| *side-by-side, sharing their fate, until they go* | *walk together until a time comes when they* |
| *their separate ways.* | *have to separate.* |
| *Jason: I will never forget you.* | |
| *Lu Yan: I guess that's what being immortal truly* | |
| *means.* | |

A careful study of the above interpretation clearly shows that the Vee-Jay intervention is that of making meaning available to the local youth audience in local meaning making style and not that of word for word translation. Through these explanations of the Vee-Jay facilitators, the youthful audience of these films make sense of the movie rendered into their local meaning-making context and thus learn new information that is not available in their context. For example, one of the youth we interviewed said he was able to learn what an airport looks like and how people get into aeroplanes. He called it the place where the aeroplanes land and fly off into the air. These movies are advertised on chalkboard as shown in Fig. 10.2 below.

## New Media Technology and User Generated Content

The Vee-Jay intervention exists not only in Uganda but also in other parts of the world because of the now easy new media technology in the developing world. For example, mobile phones have enabled communication in very hard to reach locations. The Vee-Jay type of intervention is well explained by Koltay (2011, p. 211) who cites Lankshear and Knobel (2004), "in the present day society we witness the

**Fig. 10.2** The youth check-
ing out the available movie
showing on the day

emergence of post-typographic forms of text production, distribution, and reception
that use digital electronic media." The production and distribution of information
in any form has become a very easy task. Digital production is, as Koltay (2011)
explains, subject to human agency and understanding.

This human digital intervention/interaction (agency) is what is taking place in Kam-
pala, in the form of interpreted movies. This means youth will no longer consume what
is distributed to them as is, but could intervene and recreate their own compositions
in languages and meanings that are accessible and relevant to them. This confirms
Koltay's (2011) statement that media consumption is changing by user-generated
content and the availability of digital products like CDs and voice-over recording
capabilities.

The motivation that drives the Vee-Jays into this business shows that there is a
very high rate of media consumption in Kampala and this high level of media use
is influencing, in a great way, the perception, beliefs and attitudes of these media
users. The media now serves as an agent of socialisation for the youth because they
are being exposed to a large quantity of media information in which they have the
capability of inserting their own interventions (Koltay 2011). The video centres
together with an interpretation studio is potentially a very powerful youth learning
centre that is capable of providing livelihood skill training opportunities to the out-
of-school and out-of-work youth, in addition to providing for them entertainment
edutainment and infotainment in the process.

## *The Shack Video Halls as Alternative Learning Venues for Youths*

Shack Video Halls in Uganda are called *Bibanda* (plural form) and *Kibanda* (sin-
gular) form. These *Bibanda* video halls are furnished with poorly made wooden
benches, and each *Kibanda* has at least one television screen, a video recorder and a
DVD player. The youth who come to these video halls normally sit on the benches
watching several television screens broadcasting different video films, screening
games of football at the same time.

The *Bibanda* are usually constructed using wood or mud and wattle and a temporary roof made of rusty recycled iron sheets, tin, plastic, polythene, or canvas sheeting material. They are located in high population settlements and poor neighbourhoods, for the purposes of attracting out-of-school and out-of-work youth who live in the slum areas of Kampala. These video halls are therefore lively youth social centres as described by Oosterhout (n.d.,cited in Achen and Openjuru 2012, p. 364):

> Each day an estimated thirty thousand people in Kampala are going to the 'movies'. They sit down on wooden benches inside dark structures with welcoming names like House of Entertainment and Touch of Class. The television screen is the only source of light while everybody sits knee to knee watching the 'latest' Jet Lee film or a 'John' Rambo. They nibble on cassava fingers or kabalagalas (banana cookies) instead of popcorn. The Luganda voice-over blends in with the laughter and the awes of amazement as Jackie Chan shows the audience another daring stunt. In more then (sic) six hundred reeds, wooden and stone structures, popularly known as Bibanda (shacks) or video halls, cheap entertainment is sold. For the price of a chapatti you can flee from the harsh realities of daily life, and enter the material and sophisticated world of covert western advertisement. Most beloved ingredients: high action, stunts and violence. (p. 364)

Youth from low-income families are the ones who mostly frequent these video halls. When these out-of-school youth cannot find casual work, they resort to passing time by spending whatever little they have earned on entertaining themselves and learning whatever they can learn via watching movies in the shack video halls. This category of youth are normally not very successful in formal schools because they fail to fit within the traditional school systems, usually designed for middle and upper income lifestyles inconsistent with these youth's home life environments. It is therefore important to get these youth within the learning systems and arrangements with which they are comfortable; that is, an educational system that will not try to fit the youth back into school but rather bring the school/learning into their own lived experience. This educational provision should be consistent with the social and cultural context of their everyday lives. This will require a deeper understanding of what motivates their interests and the places their motivation takes them to certainly define this new learning arrangement and engagement. Once a clear understanding of their motivation is understood it can be used to get them to engage with the realities that are shaping their everyday lives through a critical engagement with the media technology and videos that they are already attracted to, and to develop their potentialities in a direction that might enable them to break out of poverty and live a life based on informed decisions and choices rather than circumstances.

Critical literacy, media literacy and technological literacy, which these youth are already acquainted with and motivated by, are good starting points to enable them to develop not only critical world skills of understanding their lived environment but also to develop new language skills such as English, which predominates in the formal sectors of Uganda. They can also learn how to operate media technology such as video cameras, digital cameras and other recording technology to enable them not only to critique what they record from real life but also set up a business like the Vee-Jays' practices to earn an income. Already we have noted that some of the youth in this translated and interpreted movie industry engage in the production and sale of these interpreted movies for some extra income. From this they can move onto other activities within the entertainment industry such as drama and acting,

because most youth start learning acting by imitating how their favoured stars speak and behave. All these have the potential for changing youth in a positive direction.

## Conclusion and Implication for Youth Literacy Education

Internationally, most literature on youth literacy has focused on school youth literacy learning or on how to get the out-of-school youth back into school (Au 1998; Leard and Lashua 2006; Moje et al. 2000; Morrel 2002). This is mainstream thinking that sympathizes with out-of-school youth with the intention of fitting them into the mainstream way of learning and being. Rarely do scholars and educators think in terms of providing a context-appropriate learning program that is consistent with the learners' ways of being and, therefore, learning. In this chapter, we propose that the best way to approach out-of-school and out-of-work youth in Uganda should be within their own setting and environment and through systems (ways of doing things) that they understand and are of great interest and motivation to them. One such approach for improving their media literacy skills is through the concept of shack video halls with which they are already acquainted. These shack video halls have the potential of becoming inclusive learning centres to which youth come for both entertainment and learning how to interpret videos and also how shoot their own movie pictures for inclusion in the videos. Such learning centres will naturally provide very inclusive meeting spaces for learning positive values as the school formal arrangements are adapted to suit the informal and non-formal learning requirements of youth. The mix in these centres, comprised of out-of-school youth, English from the Hollywood movies, Luganda translations and interpretations from the Vee-Jays, the Hollywood Star Actors in the movie, the local youth audience and their lived reality is, in our view, a very innovative mix to provide for these excluded youth in Uganda a motivating learning opportunity.

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# Chapter 11
# Making School Relevant: Adding New Literacies to the Policy Agenda

**Cheryl McLean, Jennifer Rowsell and Diane Lapp**

## Introduction

Updating online profiles, texting, posting selfies, downloading music, surfing the web, and tweeting while walking along the street or sitting in class are all continual reminders that youth live multimodal lives. Less and less are communication, learning, and comprehension limited to traditional modes of the printed word or text and to more traditional media (although all of these text genres have been multimodal); instead, words are usually nested with visual images/graphics, aural/oral modes, animation, etc. and digital technologies. Indeed, in the popular culture-landscape, adults appear to take note of youth's multimodal literacies and multiple ways of knowing—from video games to websites that purposefully embed three key features of 'new literacies' (1) social/interactive (2) multiple modal (e.g. audio, video, print/text), and (3) creative license and expression (e.g. blogs, posts, links, fan fiction/sites). These new skills that transmediated, multimodal texts bring afford young people the opportunity to become active consumers-producers-composers of knowledge and information in a way that can *directly* and *immediately* affect and reach others everywhere, everyday.

Yet, we recognize that while adults are quick to acknowledge that today's youth are motivated by a globalized media culture, efforts to credibly and creatively validate and harness new forms of youth literacies in *formal school settings* are not without its tensions and challenges. Given the contemporary reality of popular culture, we, as educators, believe that such realities must not be limited to out-of-school

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C. McLean (✉)
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA
e-mail: cheryl.mclean@gse.rutgers.edu

J. Rowsell
Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, Canada
e-mail: jrowsell@brocku.ca

D. Lapp
San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA
e-mail: lapp@mail.sdsu.edu

contexts and popular media culture, but instead should be an integral part of the schooling experience for young people. In this chapter, we argue that schooling must be made relevant—and one such way is to learn from the globalized media and leverage the kinds of literacy practices that students access outside of school. Many educators appreciate students' new literacies and are already designing innovative and engaging literacy instruction that supports learning through multimodal texts using multiple mediums, materials, and modalities. However, without policy changes and more government advocacy and comprehensive adoption of new literacies, it is challenging to move forward.

This chapter addresses literacy education policy issues and their curricular implications at the secondary school level in Canada and the United States (U.S.). We examine overarching policy agendas, and the implications for making multimodal literacies relevant in the traditional classroom context. We use research-based classroom scenarios from Canada and the U.S. to contextualize policy agendas in order to explore (a) youth literacies, (b) connections between school and the literacies that students bring to the classroom, and (c) the tensions within and across these national and classroom contexts with respect to how youth use and navigate their literacies within curriculum constraints. Finally, we offer ways forward by highlighting perspectives and directions in which policy should be framed if we are to make schooling relevant by effectively and comprehensively adding new literacies to the policy agenda.

## Literacy and Policy: Issues in Context

Across international contexts, we are witnessing a shift in discourse from a fairly narrow view of school-based literacy as reliant on words and printed texts to policy that approaches literacy as forms of communication across diverse media. Within this trend, there are broader implications that academic achievement at all levels is premised on students' abilities to read, comprehend and communicate their understandings through multi-genres and texts. By examining central policy initiatives across Canada and the United States, it is clear that policy-makers need to do a better job at broadening literacy so that there is a greater match between literacy as it is lived and understood in the outside world and literacy as it is taught in school.

### *Canada: An Overview*

There are many policy initiatives in place that signal policy-makers' emphasis on student achievement and support of student success. In Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) states, "Every student is unique, and our high schools are changing to meet students' individual needs." (2011, p. 22). Informed by this view of learning and teaching, current policy initiatives like *The Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy*, which is a broad province-wide strategy designed to ensure that

students complete secondary schooling. The primary goal of such initiatives is to help "students in grades 7 to 12 tailor their education to their individual strengths, goals and interests" (p. 22).

A closer look at the overarching policy initiative by the Ontario MOE (2011) reflects its move toward contemporary literacies via its e-learning policy. According to the Ontario MOE policy, elementary and secondary schools must make opportunities available to students for e-learning (p. 22). Within SS/L18, digital learning is viewed as affording secondary students "flexibility" by giving them "more learning opportunities to graduate" and helping elementary students improve their "oral, reading, writing, and math skills". In addition, blended learning uses the tools of the provincial learning management system (LMS) to teach and support learning in a face-to-face class so that "K-12 students can access high-quality course materials, course calendars, and assignments during and outside school hours". Some of the online tools available to students as part of their learning on this digital teaching and virtual learning environment include discussions, blogs, email, dropbox, e-portfolio, pager, content, calendar, and grades. By offering students online course options, policy-makers signal their awareness of youth "comfort with digital tools and by extension, increased student engagement." According to the report by the Canadian Council on Learning (2008), this policy marks an explicit and highly intentional shift toward incorporating more digital literacies and broadened notions of literacy within school pedagogy.

## U.S.: An Overview

In the U.S., the federal government-mandated, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a national standards-based education reform policy designed to improve educational assessment outcomes at the elementary and secondary levels in core subject areas such as literacy and numeracy. Intended to "close achievement gaps, promote rigorous accountability, and ensure that all students are on track to graduate college- and career-ready" (n. p.), the emphasis on this nationwide educational policy was to improve reading, math and science, track annual student testing performance, and establish benchmarks for adequate yearly progress for all schools at a national level. It is important to note that continued federal funding for each state/school is contingent upon adequate school/state progress and student performance on common national assessments.

Similar to its Canadian counterpart, the U.S. has made overtures to online digital literacy learning on the large-scale level. Within the NCLB act, there was attention to technology in the Enhancing Education Through Technology Act of 2001 which was designed to provide assistance to states for a comprehensive system that "effectively uses technology at elementary and secondary schools to improve student academic achievement" including "the development and utilization of electronic networks and other innovative methods, such as distance learning" (p. 34).

## *A Critique*

The literacy policy thrusts of both North American contexts are not without merit. In fact, the policies reveal that the conception of literacy has broadened to include a broader range of modes, hence the attention to digital technologies and blended learning. As seen in the case of Ontario MOE, digital technology and online courses are viewed as important to supporting student achievement. As a result, this policy focus has yielded benefits to date which include "increased student engagement" as well as "improved teaching practices" (Canadian Council on Learning 2008, p. vii). Yet, despite these moves toward including multimodal literacies in schools, there are still barriers to success identified by the Canadian Council on Learning (2008), stemming from "the relative lack of student awareness of the Strategy and its constituent initiatives or components. Although many students are familiar with at least one of the components of the Strategy, many are unaware of the scope of programs and supports available to them" (p. ix). Although the Canadian e-learning initiatives reflect some change, they are still premised on traditional skills development and they fail to acknowledge that communication and technology make us think in different ways. By different ways of thinking, we are referring to working with different modes of meaning and communication; learning within material and immaterial spaces; and, more broadly, shifting the landscape of literacy pedagogy so that it is far more in line with the kinds of everyday texts that children, youth, and adults use. In addition, a critical look at the findings by the Council may also suggest that (1) the programs are not comprehensive and integrated, and (2) contemporary literacies are presented not as cohesive curriculum and pedagogical practice but as an add-on/flexible supplement from the traditional courses of study.

In the case of the U.S., the literacy component of the NCLB policy reveals a narrow approach to literacy. For example, at the Elementary level, there was Reading First initiative, which used scientific reading research-based instructional materials and literacy activities to develop, enhance and assess the early language, literacy skills. However, the skills focused on knowledge such as alphabetic recognition and automaticity, letter sounds and vocabulary, oral comprehension, and print conventions (U.S. ESEA 2013). At the secondary school level, literacy policy targeting youth included programs aimed at (1) prevention and intervention for school dropout (youth who are neglected, delinquent or at-risk), and (2) advanced placement programs aimed at increasing the number of students who participate and succeed. NCLB, with its emphasis on testing and accountability, has resulted in wide spread teaching to the test. As opposed to encouraging a broader interpretation of literacy and viewing literacy in-context, the emphasis on annual multiple-choice literacy tests foster narrow definitions of literacy. Although Ontario makes some efforts to broaden literacy, both the Ontario initiatives and NCLB fall short.

## What is New About 'New Literacies' in Schooling Policy?

The 2007, in response to overarching educational policies by the MOE, the Ontario English curriculum attempted to reframe and broaden the concept of literacy "in the 21st century" by spotlighting communication in addition to the skills involved in reading and writing. From a new literacies perspective, the Ontario curriculum aligns well with new literacies research—that is, to be situated in social practice, to broaden our definitions and notions of "text"; and, to foster the critical awareness of developing proficiency with multiple discourse patterns and formats of texts. Within Canadian provincial curricula such as the Ontario and British Columbia curricula, research addressing "literacy as a social practice" is being embedded in curricular objectives. In the Ontario context, the objectives confirm an inching toward a multimodal view of teaching and learning with such key outcomes as: "appreciate the cultural impact and aesthetic power of texts"; "think critically"; "communicate—that is, read, listen, view, speak, write, and represent effectively and with confidence"; "use language to interact and connect with individuals and communities for personal growth, and for participation as world citizens" (p. 5). Such language bespeaks a tacit belief that being literate calls on different kinds of skills and activities as people move seamlessly among settings and situations. There is even a footnote (p. 5) that "the word *text* (their italics) is defined in this document in the broadest sense, as a means of communication that uses words, graphics, sounds, and/or images to convey information and ideas to an audience." Clearly, these qualifiers point to substantially different perspectives undergirding the teaching of literacy.

In more recent times, the U.S. has moved toward a national adoption of overarching common academic standards that ultimately inform school curricula in all states. For example, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects calls for research and evidence-based, rigorous benchmarks and required achievements that document proficiency in and/or mastery of knowledge "essential for college and career readiness in a twenty-first-century, globally competitive society" (CCSSI 2010, p. 3). Embedded in these standards is the view that all students need to develop the ability to

> … gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and non-print texts in media forms old and new. (CCSSI 2010, p. 3)

It is here that the relationship between multimodal literacy and the academic curricular initiatives offer opportunities for educators to harness the *funds of knowledge* (Moll 1992)that students bring to the classroom. Doing so means engaging students with a wide array of multimodal texts that will support their becoming critical readers, consumers, and producers of information.

Looking across policy initiatives and curricular standards, we highlight through classroom scenarios, examples of how students use their literacies to become critical readers, writers and producers of texts. We argue that given students' knowledge

and use of multimodal texts and literacy practices we need to incorporate these into the core of all instruction. Doing so affords powerful opportunities to support students in meeting and exceeding academic standards because such literacies require metacognition, critical thinking, and an evidence-based approach in order to read, reflect and understand texts in depth.

## Bringing Multimodalities into the Classroom

In this chapter, we juxtapose the slightly different American and Canadian policy agendas with authentic classroom moments when policy is enacted to highlight the types of literacies youth bring to the classroom, and the opportunities and tensions given the existing educational policies. To do so, we focus on two secondary schools sites: one a suburban site in a suburban town outside of Toronto, Canada, and the second, an urban site in New Jersey, USA. The two scenarios drawn from actual classroom research studies illustrate how the adolescents use multimodal practices to communicate and make meaning in a classroom environment that promotes the possibility for multimodal pedagogies and students' deeper understandings about new literacies.

**Classroom Context 1. Hilltop Secondary School**  A suburban high school located in the Niagara area of Ontario near the US border, Hilltop high school is a grades 9–12 secondary school. In the town where the school is located, most of the population is white Canadian-born with little cultural diversity. There is high unemployment in the town, especially since a large car manufacturer moved out of a neighboring city. The school has been trying to raise standards across subject areas and like many other schools in the area, is at risk of closing.

**Classroom Context 2. City High School**  An urban high school located in a metropolitan city in New Jersey, in the northeastern U.S., is the second research site. The student population comprises 60% African American, 25% Latino, and 15% Caribbean. The school has been identified as underachieving, having failed to meet state and federal testing and assessment standards, and there are ongoing efforts to improve student test performance specifically in the areas of Math, English and Literacy (Social Studies/History, Science, and Special Education).

## *Classroom Moment #1*

It is the second week in March and despite having a dynamic teacher like Ms. Barling, students at Hilltop High School seem generally quite apathetic about their grade ten English class. They resist many of the canonical texts that Ms. Barling would like to teach like Shakespeare or T. S. Eliot and so, as much as possible, Ms. Barling contemporizes how she teaches students. A familiar sight when Jennifer walks into the

classroom is students sitting at their desks, many of them checking their phones and messaging. Though Ms. Barling has a 'no phone' policy, she still needs to be constantly vigilant about phone use. A lesson that stands out as a 'new' literacies lesson that captured the students' attention and imagination dealt with a novel entitled *Forbidden City* by William Bell. During an hour-long interview for Jennifer's secondary English research study at Hilltop, Ms. Barling talked about how she reads excerpts from books during most sessions to calm students. Certainly on this March day, Jennifer observed how silent and absorbed students were as she read parts of *Forbidden City.* The book recounts the fictional story about a journalist and his son who traveled to Beijing just before protests erupted in Tiananmen Square. After reading passages for a while, Ms Barling then asked if anyone wanted to read and a number of students put up their hands. After half an hour, Ms. Barling introduced a new activity to be completed during the hour left of English class. Students were asked to get into pairs and work on creating an avatar in Bitstrips, based on one of the characters in *Forbidden City,* using computers in the back of the classroom.

Most student pairs were focused on the task and talked through what characters would look and act like in the novel and translated them into a cartoon character in Bitstrips. Nonetheless, there were several groups who were not on-task and who were surfing the Internet. Noticing some pairs off-task, Ms. Barling wrapped up the activity and then talked through some of the central issues in the novel as a group discussion. Students suddenly became animated talking about the protests and how they would react if they were present during political unrest. The discussion proceeded for 25 min before the bell rang and they went to their next class.

What Jennifer appreciated after taking stock of the morning and writing field-notes is the blending of what could be described as traditional or conventional teaching methods such as read alouds with newer methods such as creating cartoon avatars for characters. Having observed five classes prior to this one, it was clear that most students in this class were engaged and this engagement could largely be attributed to a hybrid teaching model of new and old, oral and visual, performative and silent. What struck Jennifer the most is how effective Ms. Barling's diversity in approaches and methods to teaching a text was with this group of applied students. For a researcher committed to new approaches and epistemologies to the teaching and learning of literacy, Jennifer realized the importance of retaining more age-old approaches like oral readings with newer, multimodal and digital methods like animated characters for protagonists. With policy in- mind, it could be argued that new literacies approaches is less about throwing out 'traditional approaches' and more about negotiating methods and including different modes and formats of representing and communicating to capture students' imaginations.

## *Classroom Moment #2*

It is the first week of the 11th grade unit on *The Crucible*. Seated in rows, the students read out loud their respective parts of their assigned parts, with the class pausing at the end of the scene for a teacher-led discussion of the events, characters, and themes. Students quickly lose interest: "*Yo, Mr. D., you're killing me here…! (Laughter).*" A few students fall asleep. Confused voices complain loudly: "*What? I just don't get it.*" Then, the collective pronouncement as frustrations increase: "*This book is dumb!*"

   Fast-forward one year to a new group of students. As the students enter the classroom, they are greeted by images from a PowerPoint presentation: some of graphic scenes of pain, innocence, war, community, loss, love, violence, loyalty etc. interspersed with images and symbols from the central text, *The Crucible*. Mirroring the screen images are large photos posted strategically around the room. Like the digital slides, some are in bold color and/or muted hues; some include print; some depict people or settings. Accompanying these scenes are brief movie clips, and background music—excerpts from songs both traditional and contemporary popular culture— that create a musical narrative supporting the visual and animated images. The classroom setting, curriculum content, and modes of instruction intentionally immerse students in multi-text negotiation: they are *reading* visuals, print, audio, video and oral discussions, and making meaning of *The Crucible through* and *with* these multiple texts…. The buzz begins: The students immediately start engaging with each other and engaging the teacher—asking questions, investigating the images, analyzing song lyrics. Cell phones are out and computers are on as students begin researching songs, movies, authors and current events; they share links, post images to each other's Facebook; email Mr. Daniels their notes and ideas, while animatedly discussing the text and task of responding to the question prompts.

## Discussion: Connections Across Youth Multimodal Literacies

In the two instructional scenarios, we see that the adolescents come to the classroom with expanded bases for knowing, comprehending, and using multimodalities. In both Mrs. Barling's (pseudonym) and Mr. Daniels' (pseudonym) classrooms, the students demonstrate facility with information and communication technologies (ICTs), and as such, already know how the use the internet, online social network sites, etc. Communication and comprehension are not limited/restricted to the traditional printed text (as in the traditional newspaper or canonical play). More so, the young persons' performances reflect their understanding of and comfort with the simultaneous use of a range of modes to make meaning. In the case of Ms. Barling, she "reads" her students well and can negotiate new and old approaches artfully and as needed. And, in the case of Mr. Daniels' class in which Cheryl was the researcher,

unlike the traditional emphasis on students' learning through linguistic performances from one year prior, literacy learning in this classroom has now evolved to a range of texts and practices. As Cheryl observed in her fieldnotes, and in interviews with Mr. Daniels and the students, unlike the tension of disinterest, boredom and frustration when faced with solely linguistic, uni-dimensioned tasks, there is now increased engagement, collaboration, and connections being made within and across texts (e.g. print, visual, sound, digital technologies etc.) and among learners.

The modes and literacies used here by these youth in both instructional scenarios are multilayered: the students draw on their own knowledge, other texts, media and the world in order to understand a central text, *The Crucible* and to analyze the article. Through the combination of the formats, images/photos, video and songs, the students are afforded opportunities to experience and connect with the central text through multiple supporting texts. The general intent guiding the instruction is to have the students engage in dialogue with the texts based on their own literacies, experiences, emotions, and stories. For example, having made the initial connection, Mr. Daniels then guides his students toward making connections with other texts they have read, viewed, listened to etc. (e.g. from multimedia and popular culture such as a favorite song or movie). Deeper connections are then made to world events and social issues that move the discussion beyond the classroom. Throughout the exercise, Mr. Daniels offers guiding prompts and sentence-frames that help support the ideas and responses students generate as they think, talk, read and write: (1) This (image/text) reminds me of a time when…. (2) This (event/image) is similar to (event/image) because…. (3) This (event/image/text) is different from (event/image/text) because…. (4) This makes me think of (song/movie) because…. (5) I think the (author/composer/singer's) purpose or intention was…. (6) What did the (author/composer/text) use to achieve the purpose or intent? (7) What (event/image) worked/didn't work? Why/why not? (8) I read/heard about a (social/world event)…

Note that the instructional intent is to help students get a deeper understanding of contrasting and complementary compositional choices and approaches, and the ways in which writers/authors/composers take different paths to address similar topics/issues. However, by making critical and creative use of new literacies, the task draws directly on what these youth are already doing in their everyday lives. And, in so doing, these students recognize that they have the knowledge and that they *are being recognized and valued* as having this knowledge. More so, through this multimodal and multi-text instruction Mr. Daniels' students are meeting CCSS, Anchor Standard 9: "*Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take*" (2010, p. 10).

In a comparative way, students in Ms. Barling's class arrive disenchanted with what they often, or so they say in interviews, view as anachronistic texts that are tough to relate to. The students in Ms. Barling's grade 10 applied English class need to complete a required course and need convincing about the wonders of literature. Like Mr. Daniels, Ms. Barling emphasizes the performative in her oral readings and she encourages students to connect with content. To lessen the gulf that students feel between canonical texts and the popular texts they read out of school, Ms. Barling

emphasizes contemporary works and privileges Canadian books read in-class. Aware of curriculum standards and Ontario's increasing emphasis on "twenty-first century literacy skills", Ms. Barling actively incorporates technology, but at the same time she appreciates that technology and the digital is not a panacea. For her, much like Mr. Daniels, it is about connecting with texts and about diversifying approaches as ways into text content. Ms. Barling speaks directly to the Ontario English curriculum's goal to foster:

> … students' intellectual, social, cultural, and emotional growth and must be seen as a key component of the curriculum. When students learn to use language, they do more than master the basic skills. They learn to value the power of language and to use it responsibly. They learn to express feelings and opinions and to support their opinions with sound arguments and evidence from research. (Ontario English Curriculum 2007, p. 9).

She has quotes to this effect in her classroom at Hilltop and she frequently spoke with Jennifer about acknowledging student experiences, feelings and emotions.

The Hilltop students were engaged in deep reading of multiple texts and text types and demonstrate their capacity to distinguish types of content, and to critically engage with arguments and text formats. On the whole, this kind of reading analysis not only compels them to dissect and deconstruct content and arguments, but also to analyze the visual composition of texts. While focusing on choices made by the authors, readers are compelled to recognize that word choice, spatial dimensions, and images preside over arguments. By moving from off-line to online spaces, readers recognize that media and digital affordances offer new, different possibilities for reading such as browsing screens, scrolling and scanning multiple websites, clicking, following and reading hyperlinks, communicating through social networks, and the associated forms of producing texts which present potentials for making-meaning in both 'reading' and 'writing' which are quite unlike those which existed when only uni-dimensional texts and text types are read. Through this instruction, students use multiple versions of the same text to move across media channels. They therefore fulfill a core outcome of the Ontario English curriculum which is to become effective readers and writers "to think clearly, creatively, and critically about ideas and information encountered in texts in order to analyze, understand and absorb them" (2007, p. 15). Implicit within such a curricular outcome is a belief that teenagers 'read' and make meaning from a vast range of texts. They 'read' information on handheld mobile devices, through magazines and new media texts, school texts, and interactive texts on television and computer screens.

## Critique: Possibilities and Tensions

The two classroom scenarios we presented highlight what we consider to be some inherent pedagogical possibilities of integrating new literacies into the classroom, but also signal the tensions that can arise particularly from an educational policy perspective. Though efforts are being made by both countries to include ICTs and new literacies in the educational policy, there is one key missing element that gives

credibility, value and legitimacy to any educational policy: assessment. The primary mode of testing continues to be print-based/linguistic, and rubrics for measuring and assessing multimodal design tasks are not used on the state, provincial or national levels. In the classroom, our research has shown that even though teachers may assign multimodal tasks they continue to use traditional print/linguistic criteria to assess and evaluate (McLean and Rowsell 2013).

With the multimodal and new literacies-based classroom, learning becomes an active process as students are not required to leave their literacies at the door; instead, there are expected to bring this knowledge and use their practices as tools to help them think, question and engage with the text, and communicate and share knowledge. However, we acknowledge that such an approach may require a pedagogical reality shift for some educators who have grown accustomed to using uni- or mono-dimensional literature and content texts, instructional approaches, and assessments that are at odds with students' multimodal ways of learning and meaning-making. This does not imply having an exclusive emphasis on digital literacies because that too would be uni-dimensional and limit a student being able to engage with other modes beyond the linguistic, for comprehension and expression. Instead being literate for youth today means that they "should be able to both read critically and write functionally, no matter what the medium" (Kist 2004).

Growing implementation of multiple modes offer teachers opportunities to build from a wider base of knowledge and skills students bring to each situation. Intent on differentiating learning, these teachers realized that instruction facilitating personalization must attend to each learner's prior knowledge, expertise, and interest as related to the topic and the complexity of the content. Multiple mediums support depth in learning because of the variations that can occur through multiple modalities, possible sequencing, levels of interactivity, interest, prompting, pacing and guidance (Clark et al. 2006) and because teaching that invites multimodal experiences complements the countless ways twenty-first century learners receive and share information.

However, in the contemporary classroom, there is the reality of the conflict of old and new world, spaces, knowledge and literacies. The heavy value placed on traditional practices, values and norms resist popular culture in favor of the status quo. As a result, in school, youth literacies can often be sidelined or devalued: used as an add-on or relegated to "fun" or "filler" for real or important academic tasks and/or ignored by teachers who do not have expertise or resist change. Thus, youth we first met at the start of the chapter, or in Mrs. Barling's and Mr. Daniels' classes, are often forced to power off/dumb down their literacies and knowledge in school that continue to value traditional print/linguistic texts, tasks, evaluations and assessments.

## Can Policy Move with the Times?

Reflecting on the policy perspectives of the Ontario MOE and Ontario English Curriculum, and the NCLB and Common Core State Standards of the United States, we can anticipate changes to our communicational landscape. With these changes come a degree of optimism about broadening our notions of literacy and what it means to communicate effectively today. To varying degrees, Canada and the US are taking up the banner of twenty-first century literacy practices as these standards and curriculum are addressed. Yet, as with many policy initiatives around the world, implementation efforts may not be equal or not quite radical enough. To support full implementation we believe that both educators and policy makers must afford more status to young people to become producers of knowledge rather than mere consumers. Margaret Mead (1970) encouraged this expansion of status when she schematized that learning within a culture function in three ways: "*postfigurative*, in which children learn primarily from their forebears, *cofigurative*, in which both children and adults learn from their peers, and *prefigurative*, in which adults learn from their children" (p. 1; emphasis in original). Successful cultures must embrace prefigurative change, in part because of expansive technological changes: "Today, suddenly, because all the peoples of the world are part of one electronically based, intercommunicating network, young people everywhere share a kind of experience that none of the elders ever have had or will have" (p. 50). Communities of scholars, regardless of age, are needed for information exploration that draws on ever expanding technologies.

The earlier vignettes we shared reveal teaching practices in place that: 1) acknowledge such forces as register and visual communication; 2) adopt alternative perspectives on texts; and, 3) identify contemporary literacy practices such as remix. The actual thinking that goes into communicating effectively and being literate entails thinking in relation to modes of expression and which one can afford the best communication for a specific instance. This transformation is definitely necessary if school is to remain relevant and open to learning through multimodal and new blended literacies. The implementation of new literacies practices in schools requires a reconceptualizing of the way classroom context, texts, and instruction are organized and delivered. Students like those we have described will challenge teachers to think about the effective integration of (1) content knowledge, (2) range of modes that best convey the content, and (3) ways to critically analyze, represent, and assess knowledge.

We argue that multimodality and new literacies offer a way for educators to embrace youth who are multimodal knowledge producers and consumers. When the immediacy and the collaborative nature of digital and technological media is at the heart of communication, then the texts, contexts, meanings, and knowledge produced and consumed become increasingly fluid and dynamic. So, in just a few minutes a16 year old student in New Jersey, U.S.A. can blog about a movie premiere, read her 'Friends' comments from around the world on her Facebook Wall,

tweet a meme from the movie and have it re-tweeted by followers from the Niagara region in Canada. In such a literacy event, this young person's literacy practices and modes of learning and communicating are not uni-dimensional nor is she relegated to solely the role of learner. Her facility with and movement across the various modes allow her to simultaneously become teacher-learner, novice-expert, producer-consumer, reader-writer, word-world. However, such multimodal opportunities for learning cannot continue to be confined to out-of-school contexts, as is often the case. Finding ways to leverage students' multimodal literacies in the classroom and schools in meaningful ways is what helps make school relevant for it is doing the substantive work of harnessing youth literacies to engage and make real-world connections and develop skills needed for a globally competitive society.

## Materializing Hidden Literacies

To support access to multimodal opportunities for every student, a broadened view of what constitutes literacy learning and instruction is demanded. Integrating multimodal instruction means that teachers must have an expanded concept of text that includes visuals, videos, digital/internet, graphics, performance, podcasts etc., and a belief that multiple modes and media enhance students' abilities to read deeply, think critically and express themselves succinctly as they draw directly on their experiences, knowledge and skills, and diverse learning styles (Gainer and Lapp 2010). Teachers must view these multiple modes and formats of texts as essential to learning rather than as luxuries and add-ons that are used simply for entertainment with little relevance to academic literacy and achievement.

Multimodality should inform how we organize and deliver instruction because it deepens the ways students read and make meaning by drawing on diverse learning styles and allowing the learner to move beyond reliance solely on the printed word. Implementation of intentional multimodal instruction will transform *how* and *what* students learn throughout the curriculum, multimedia and types of texts being read and written, and the structure and delivery of information.

The physical and material "face" of the curriculum should take on a less traditional appearance; no longer can curriculum content be limited to traditional print text. This entails a broad range of print, non-print and digital texts that would form the core curriculum including but not limited to blogs, wikis, podcasts, websites, graphic novels, zines, magazines, videos, digital stories, visual images, and performance. Through these modes of new blended literacies students will have ongoing opportunities to make deep literacy connections that prompt critical thinking across multimodal texts and formats. For example, by comparing multiple versions of similar events, (for example, online site, blog report, newspaper, and tv report) students can critically analyze the foci, arguments, perspectives, affordances of each mode, compositional choices etc. The intent of the instruction is to develop their critical consumption and production of texts.

## New Literacies Policy in Practice

Recognizing Canadian provincial curricula and the Common Core Standards in the United States, we note that even though gaps continue to exist in concepts, language, the logic of multimodal and policy relationships, it is critical that a policy agenda be not only committed to providing infrastructure funding for technology but more importantly, to a radical shift in the ways in which we frame contemporary literacy learning. The tools alone will not do the job for teachers. What is needed is significant research into the ramifications of such new literacies as haptic or touch-based learning through iPads; how to teach multimodal composition effectively and assess multimodality in a nuanced and informed way; how to shift pedagogical frames from oral readings to such new learning skills as game-based approaches to teaching and learning. There are so many new frontiers in teaching communicational skills that remain, as yet, unimagined. The first stage needs to be rethinking literacy teacher education so that it is far more aligned with new practices and epistemologies.

Even in the face of possible support for new literacies in policy, equally as important is the actual practice: the teachers charged with delivering the instruction. Facilitating students' learning through new blended literacies may pose challenge for educators for it requires (1) refining of teacher knowledge, (2) pedagogical shifts, and (3) creative revisioning of curricular content.

Teacher knowledge is a critical and sometimes overlooked component in the quest for a learning environment that complements students' twenty-first century literacies. In order for teachers to be able to design lessons and deliver instruction that draws on multiple texts, a range of modes and blended models of new literacies, they must be familiar with these modes, their affordances, their constraints, and the language/grammar and the logic of design. What we are saying is that there is a logic of design—a process in which meaning making involves understanding that each mode has a particular affordance(s) or potential to do something (Kress 1997)and it is this knowledge about that potential, and how it converges and remixes with other modes that allows the user to harness its possibilities in powerful and creative ways. Consequently, when teachers may not consider themselves adept with technology and/or do not have the knowledge, skill or language and are faced with the challenge of integrating digital and multimedia texts in their instruction, they feel threatened, and resist implementation for fear of failure (McLean and Rowsell 2013). It is here that professional development needs to be an integral part of policy, for teachers must be equipped with the skills and knowledge with which to effectively apply these literacies to their instruction.

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# Chapter 12
# From 'Othering' to Incorporation: The Dilemmas of Crossing Informal and Formal Learning Boundaries

**Julian Sefton-Green**

The argument of this paper is fundamentally sceptical about the prospects for radical educational reform as a consequence of digital technologies. I will begin by suggesting that the past 20 years have seen a paradoxical attitude to the learning experienced by young people as consequence of their engagement and participation in digital culture. On the one hand, research has underwritten a notion of the strangeness or otherness of digital culture, characterising it as fundamentally new and different encompassing changed literacies, as ways of comprehending and manipulating and even understanding knowledge. This position is premised on an argument about an alleged deep structural difference between the digital world and the day-to-day mundanity of schooling. On the other hand, this strangeness has been at the forefront of anxieties about changing childhoods, alienated youth, the penetration of consumerism into make-up of the young and a decline in fundamental education standards. Both of these (contradictory) aspects have, I suggest, been part of a deep process of differentiation from an assumed norm. We are now witnessing a period where the everyday, typified by a construct of average public schooling, is now fighting back; the current period is characterised by a series of interventions where these alleged differences between schooling and digital culture are being recuperated and standardised in 'normal' schooling.

I suggest, building on Derrida's theorisations of the binary, that not only is the idea of a difference ultimately no more than a state of desire, of yearning for the exotic and the unattainable but that on theoretical, practical and ethical grounds such realignment or transformations are extremely difficult and say more about political aspirations for social change and economic growth than the realties of education.

I have deliberately used a language of emotions here—desire, otherness, yearning—because I want to stress how much I think this debate is fuelled by the irrational and the felt—however odd this might seem in an era of bureaucratic conformity and State planning. Indeed, whilst education provision is usually considered a rational process, I want to suggest that in its capacity to make children's learning strange

J. Sefton-Green (✉)
London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK
e-mail: julian@julianseftongreen.net

it is entering a different kind of arena than that usually measured by the tools of educational evaluation; and to refuse the change metaphors lying behind so much of the 'digital multimedia vernacular'.

The structure of this chapter will begin by sketching out ways in which the literature characterising the 'Net Generation' functions as a way of 'othering', as well as ways of imagining forms of informal learning as in some ways different, and more authentic than normative constructions of school based learning. I will then consider some of the of challenges (theoretical, practical and ethical) to ways of overcoming or negotiating this 'divide' using (where possible) concrete examples of how local initiatives have attempted to bridge or link across the formal and informal domains. My conclusion is that the idea of a boundary that can or cannot be crossed is a pernicious and ultimately a false construct.

## The 'Net Generation' Hypothesis

The term 'Net Generation' is not used precisely but as a kind of short-hand. A wide range of commentators, journalists, academics, politicians and other kinds of cultural critics are in practice, happy operating with a notion that there has been a sea-change in the nature of learning particularly for young people due to their use of digital technology, especially the Internet. This is now a kind of common sense and as a 'fact' it permeates virtually all discussion about Youth, Education and contemporary society.

However, it should be noted that this view has not been totally accepted and it is contested both in kind and in degree (Buckingham 2007). There are two kinds of criticism: first that such changes demonstrate negative impact, that digital technologies have brought about a decline in the quality of young people's life-course experiences. This is bound up in the popularisation of the idea of a 'toxic childhood' (Palmer 2006).

One key criticism of the impact of media technologies (the generation of scholarship proceeding the current interest in the digital) is that traditional boundaries between age stages have been broken down and previously demarcated life experiences (childhood, adult, youth) have become compromised and exposed (Meyrowitz 1985). This issue of the blurring of life-stage boundaries is even more acute in discussions of the impact of the digital/online and, to an extent, it has led to a more common learning theory relating to all life-stages than had existed previously.

There are good questions to be asked about what timescale is needed to ascertain properly long term impacts from changes in behaviour, ability or even physiology (there has been speculation about the effect of adolescent thumbs as a consequence of repeated game playing)[1]. At the heart of these problems is a deep question as to what kinds of model of effect is at work. Are we talking about changes in behaviour

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[1] Or see for example: http://www.reghardware.co.uk/2009/03/30/videogame_eyesight_research/; http://www.susangreenfield.com/science/screen-technologies/.

or changes in capacity or capability, deep rooted cognitive shifts as in the effects of literacy (Scribner and Cole 1981) or notions of affordances—that its how the use of tools change one's ability to imagine or carry out particular tasks (Wertsch 1997)? What kind of time period is needed to observe deep changes? Many commentators use forms of popular evolutionary theory and are happy to speculate about adaptation; but are kinds of social Darwinism scientifically appropriate to describe the impact of a few years playing with computers?

Notions of effect over time are entwined with casual generalisations about generational change popularised by the idea of digital natives and immigrants, (Prensky 2006). Don Tapscott, an influential populariser of Net Generation impacts, has produced two books (Tapscott 1999, 2008) whose titles 'Growing up' and 'Grown up', neatly express this alleged generational shift. Although there are other popular notions of generational change, Generation X or Y, other sociologists tend to operate on other timescales and with other kinds of determinants; see Dwyer and Wyn's (2001) study of the effect of the re-structuring of capitalism on a post 1970's Generation, for example.

Whilst studies exist showing changing access to the Net and changing patterns of leisure use,[2] there are to date no ways of evaluating the impact of changing social uses across population cohorts. Most research exploring new ways of learning are small scale and qualitative so we have little sense of how large swathes of the population might be affected by changes in behaviour. And of course, whether the impact of the use of digital technologies is equal and equivalent for all people is another important issue that has not, to my knowledge, been investigated.

The idea that persistent interaction with digital technologies has changed fundamental aspects of how young people create and are created by themselves lies at the heart of the Net Generation hypothesis. It is the perceived nature of the *differences* between this model of self-formation and traditional ones that has led to the current dilemma. Schools, teachers and parents are struggling to come to terms with a gap between what is expected and what they are presented with day-to-day.

There are two important aspects to this 'gap'. First we have the idea that digital technology facilitates access to a wide range of public, civic, community, interest and friendship groupings. Young people can interact online and can act in any of these *fora* with independence and authority. There have been a series of studies exploring all of these discrete areas examining the extent to which the online life does or does not afford these new opportunities and how (and who by) they are taken up. Of particular interest seems to be the question of civics (see Bennett 2008). However ethnographers of childhood and observers of changing forms of culture have also noted the changing role of online life for all kinds of social activity as summed up in a title of the book ' Hanging Out, Messing Around, Geeking Out: Living and learning with New Media' (Ito et al. 2010) [3].

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[2] The range of research projects led by Sonia Livingstone are good examples of this: http://www. eukidsonline.Net/.

[3] http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/report.

There is the idea that such processes support qualitatively different notions of collective and collaborative activity, especially those that relate to learning. Scholars of computer gaming as well as online life have noted that inhabiting rule-bound virtual worlds encourages discrete kinds of social behaviour, an outcome that has ramifications for education. Working in teams, on focused and dedicated tasks, being able to work at ones' own pace and within one's own time-frames, knowing how and who to ask for support, parcelling out parts of a task, working with international and non-place-based colleagues, and of developing appropriate and distinct ways of talking and communicating have all been investigated by various scholars as posing serious qualitative differences to forms of inquisitive behaviour (see for example Palfrey and Gasser 2008). Again, a number of scholars have noted how such behaviours are quite specifically at odds with dominant forms of teaching learning within the curriculum with its individualised modes of study and assessment (see for example Shaffer 2006, 2008).

Both of these *foci* contribute to a key issue in the literature, how being able to act with others in virtual and virtual-real (that is those online *fora* where there is clear reference to offline issues, whether political, civic or even just an interest grouping) changes the agency or power of the young person as a social actor. In more extreme cases young people take up roles of authority, for example in the work of Gee (2004) where game players 'know' more and are expert within their own communities and knowledge domains. However, even more basic forms of interactivity have been characterised as offering users greater control than hitherto experienced (Turkle 1997). Scholars have debated the precise nature of this empowerment. Crudely speaking there is a boosterish position (Tapscott 2008) suggesting that there has been a fundamental reconfiguration of power, agency and authority which is offset by more sceptical analysis suggesting that the limits of authority are circumscribed (Willett 2008).

In general the range of new skills learnt interactively by young people break down into *user* and *producer* types—existing on a sliding scale. User skills can be both mental and physical, covering for example information retrieval and manipulation, or indeed increased hand-eye co-ordination as an example of the second type. Producer skills range from the ability to customise to making expressive media (O'Hear and Sefton-Green 2004). The spread of these abilities and the different ways young people learn them though various forms of self or peer teaching (Willett and Sefton-Green 2002) is contested and unequal with scant sociological evidence about reach and penetration, with case studies examples often used as standing in for more general habits. Attention to the power of auto didacticism and its various trial-and-error methods has important implications for formal education (Sefton-Green 2004a) but this must not stand in way of a level headed evaluation of what David Buckingham (2008) has called the 'banality' of much new media use.

The discussion then of the range of skills and competences demonstrated in new media use range from the capacity to manipulate computers, programmes, icons, and other formal features of digital technologies to learning the rules, conventions, genres of chat rooms, games and soon—the more cultural side to these activities. Much attention has been paid to the mastery of text and its seemingly organic

transmutations through different language shapes and forms in chat and other on-line interactions (see for example Pahl and Rowsell (2006) or Snyder (2006). The producer skillset has ranged from study of adaption and customisation to more complex cultural activities like digital story telling[4] film and audio (Gilje et al. 2010), and of course websites or blogs (Stern 2004).

The early scholars of computers and learning have always been interested in ways that technology may or may not transform cognitive processes (Greenfield 1984; Papert 1993). Whilst the section above enumerated skills that those demonstrated though action, there is also the argument that different ways of thinking are at stake. There are several key domains. One is the effect on *modelling*—that is how computer interactions support ways of imagining or conceptualising problems, from ideas of space and place to mathematical relationships. Second is the issue of *meta-cognition*—that how we can be supported to reflect on and think between and across hitherto discrete phenomena. Third, is the issue of *information processing* and the study of changes in how knowledge is stored, accessed and retrieved affects intellectual activity (Bransford 1998).

As noted above, one feature of Net Generation behaviours is that they support young people to emerge from more bounded domains to act as fully empowered individuals in more public arenas. One key aspect of this is that implicit norms about barriers or boundaries to stages of the life course are crossed—for example allowing young people to act outside of the home and certainly with greater independence unfettered from adult supervision. This aspect of Net Generation behaviour is the most contentious, especially as noted where such behaviours transgress the possibilities of regulation and threaten the protection mechanisms we are accustomed to (for extended discussion see Zittrain (2008). It is certainly true that a main reason that schools are shy of demonstrating interest in Net Generation behaviours is because of the (reasonable) threat of legal or moral retribution in respect of this boundary crossing.

On the other hand, it precisely this capability of young people to act in public forums, to assert their views, to express their opinions and to join in public discussion which motivates our interest (Tapscott 2008; Palfrey and Gasser 2008). The stories of young people who have become gainfully employed through online interactions and those who have managed to 'punch above their weight' are telling and contribute to the sense that the Net Generation needs to be considered as possessing qualitatively different 'rights' than prior generations. Again this may say more about the absence of rights or respect with which we commonly address the young, but it also points to a significant reconfiguration of power relationships which again challenges how schools are currently set up and run—especially, it has been noted, in regard to the uses of reputational measurement as well as public and instantaneous feedback.

Although it is unclear precisely how to measure such effects, there is a generally agreed body of international research that documents a series of changing behaviours and competences by some young people as a result of their use of digital

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[4] For example http://www.intermedia.uio.no/mediatized/.

technologies. We do not know how equal, far-reaching or wide-spread such changes are, but a series of identified behaviours which offer authentic and challenging learning experiences have been enumerated. These coalesce around a different kind of learning self—different that is from forms of subjectivity validated by current school arrangements, such as who can act with authority across a series of domains and who is accustomed to forms of collaboration, genuine challenge, experimentation, risk-taking, curiosity and expressivity.

## Digital Learning: Mapping the Research Field

A second way to 'cut the cake' as it were, and another way of reflecting on the construction of this kind of informal learning is to offer a thematic typology or map of the research into young people and digital learning. Inevitably this section will traverse some of the ground covered in the section above because it is impossible not to define the concepts we are using to characterise learning without reference to them in any mapping process. It should also be noted there are limits to any meta-reviewing or mapping methodology as any attempt at a total snapshot is inevitably overly ambitious.

### *Literacy*

Net Generation habits have frequently been characterised as a kind of 'literacy' (Sefton-Green et al. 2009). This is for two reasons: first of all, the computer and video games is in effect a form of 'text'—used in its broadest sense encompassing the visual, interactivity and other kinds of multimodality (Jewitt and Kress 2003). On one level it is how Net Generation engages with these changing texts that defines their distinctness and much interest in the changing nature of learning has been led by advocates of the new literacy movement, as represented in this volume and who focus on these dimensions.

Secondly, the idea of literacy is used as a way of summing up competence in a new domain, as in emotional literacy, computer literacy, visual literacy and so on. Whilst other scholars have debated the validity of the use of the concept of literacy as a way of understanding insights in all of these domains (Buckingham et al. 2005), nevertheless understanding Net Generation activities and learning as a kind of literacy clearly strikes a popular chord as a way of summing up the sea-change in capabilities comparable to the importance of the introduction of print literacy in the development of modern societies (Luke 1989).

Whether they acknowledge it or not, many proponents of the literacy paradigm tend to adopt a derived version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. This suggests that the structure of language determines the nature of thought and that the acquisition of written language has concomitant effects. By the same token, new media literacy,

it is suggested, structures our thinking and being in the world in the same way. One key issue then is the precise nature of the new media textual universe and, in particular, its reliance on forms of print literacy translated to the screen. The Net Generation's competences are clearly not just reducible to the use of audio or the visual, however integrated or prominent such domains may be. Here then we have to consider whether the Net Generation abilities represent an extension of print literacy competence (implying that print competence is a necessary building block for further growth), or whether it in any way replaces the dominance of print literacy in our culture.

## Learning Theories

Alongside Literacy scholars, learning theorist have speculated that the Net Generations' skillset implies a reconfiguration in Learning Theory. The OECD talks about New Millennium Learners[5] even if detailed characterisation is a little thin at present, and other scholars refer to a 'New Science of Education (Kalantzis and Cope 2008; Dumont et al. 2010). James Gee (2004) has focused on computer games and offered 36 learning principles based on a synthesis of new literacy studies (especially semiotic domains), situated cognition—the work of cognitive sciences—and 'connectionism' (types of patterns recognition). These principles articulate a whole theory of learning which is culturally situated, text based and which leads to deeper, richer forms of educative experience. Other scholars, like Kalantzis and Cope (2008), have used some of the tropes of Net Generation competence that we have previously identified to develop what they argue is a new theory of learning for changing forms of economic production in post-industrial societies. Whilst some claims about the newness of these theories may deserve further research, the argument of this section is that an established scholarly apparatus has been developed which engages at a theoretical level to explain the learning that both causes and/or is a symptom of Net Generation behaviours.

## Knowledge Society

The main problem with new theories of learning or even theories of new learning is that it is difficult to disentangle cause and effect. It is not clear whether there are changes to the nature of the learning (like the observation above about the persistence of print literacy as the foundation for new literacies); and, furthermore, if there are changes, whether these drive or are driven by wider socio-economic changes. Indeed many theorists use observations of the Net Generation as a form of *post hoc propter hoc* explanation for an analysis of wider economic re-structuring of the knowledge economy. Thus discussions about the role of knowledge access,

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5 http://www.oecd.org/document/10/0,3343,en_2649_35845581_38358154_1_1_1_1,00.html.

retrieval and use, for example, permeate speculation about the Network society (Castells 2000); debates about remixing originality and pastiche have a similar role in arguments about intellectual property (Mason 2008), just as the role of blogging is related to wider theories of citizen journalists (Gillmor 2006). The title of a 2004 book, 'Got Game: How the Gamer Generation Is Reshaping Business Forever' (Beck and Wade 2004) sums up this peculiar and possibly inverted understanding of cause and effect. Observations about learning and the Net Generation is often used as part of wider analysis of deeper structural change.

Here the boosterish work of some of the leading proponents of the Net Generation, especially Tapscott (1999, 2008) is indistinguishable from advocacy for the creative economy. Although scholars have taken such discussion of learning to task as being driven by an apology for neo-liberalism (Buckingham 2007), such a way of framing our understanding of learning does inform public debate and remains a contentious element in any assessment of the difference posed by the Net Generation to the needs of an education system.

## Cultures of Childhood and Youth

As already noted, scholars of childhood and youth have contributed distinctly to the study of informal learning. A particular focus has been on the role of markets and the changing place of children and young people as actors within a changing commercialised environment (Kline et al. 2003). Scholars have noted how induction into forms of commercially mediated play offers forms of 'structuration' that impact on notions of changing subjectivity (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2004). Studies of the role of commercial companies exploring new home markets opened up by digital technologies (Kenway and Bullen 2001; Buckingham and Scanlon 2002) not only develop this theme, but obviously explore the role of and nature of what informal learning might mean in these changing domestic contexts.

On the whole, these approaches have identified a continuum of approaches to informal learning. At one end of the scale are forms of re-packaging formal constructs of learning (curriculum based software, grade testing etc) for use in informal settings; at the other end are ideas that playing within web sites run by large media conglomerates, digital activities associated with Toy brands and so forth may develop forms of learning, but that such learning may be no more than preparation for other kinds of consumer behaviour.

A second strand of research within this culturalist frame explores the home as a site for learning alongside examinations of inter- peer interactions as defining changing sites for learning (see Sefton-Green 2004b). Peer cultures also support friendship and interest driven participation and sustain a host of learning experiences [6]. Theories of participatory communities of learning based on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) are often used to underpin studies of peer-to-peer pedagogy.

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[6] http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/report.

However, a persistent theme in this literature—evidenced strongly in the Ito et al. project (2010) is the dichotomies between this world of participation, authority and 'meaning' and the seemingly sterile activities of the classroom.

A key principle underpinning much research is that of a paradigm shift or at least degrees of difference between old and new ways of learning. This is carried out either through a compound of learning theories or through a new literacies approach; through ethnographic and social anthropological models, or even through study of the interpolating function of the market. There is considerable uniformity that learning outside the school is in some way in serious competition with Schooling. This has a series of significant implications for how schools address, engage and empower young people.

## Crossings to Nowhere: Dislocation and Difference

Rather than take the arguments developed in the research discussed in the preceding two sections at face value, I want to suggest that this construction of opposition and of difference within such analyses of change work to efface productive understandings of learning. In the way that Derrida (1981) notes that any valorisations of one half of a binary makes the other 'abject' and empty, I am suggesting that by constructing informal learning as other and different, the literature works to construct a tension between the idea of qualitatively new and different kinds of learning and a normative construction of schooled learning.

The idea that school learning can in some way be fairly constructed as an undifferentiated norm is of course not empirically verifiable—it is clearly a rhetorical position—but one of the key effects of the informal learning discourse is to construct the homogeneity of school learning as 'fact'. Indeed it is impossible to imagine informal or any new kinds of learning without some internalised frame of reference that is a generalised and normative cliché of school experience.

Furthermore, in England, public discourse about what Seely Brown (2006) calls the new 'digital multimedia vernacular' has to be contextualised as a form of rhetoric acting in concert with wider debates about the broader capability and function of State funded education. It cannot be a co-incidence that system wide indicators developing out of forms of New Public Management, which emphasise high stakes testing alongside widespread public concerns about the changing nature of the labour market, have thrown a consensus about the purpose and function of State funded education into some kind of crisis at the same time as we have witnessed the kind of expansion in learning horizons outlined in the sections above. There is something faintly schizophrenic about the excitement and expansion of new digital horizons as we also live through a contraction or even a closing down of educational innovation and reform within the school system as centralised control of curriculum, de-professionalization of the workforce and even prescriptions about pedagogy have held sway.

This conjunction of rhetorics cannot be an accident and many critics have pointed to the marketisation of education with an increasing role of private money as the key to understanding this change (Ball 2007; Buckingham 2007) . An important implication of this analysis would be how access to and competence in the informal digital domain is implicated in the process of stratification of labour skills. From an English point of view the changes in subjectivity, the collaborative nature of social learning and so-forth identified in the literature above, become forms of differentiation and individuation—the attributes of the new 'creative class' (Florida 2003), and not therefore a process of opening up and democratisation that much of the literature suggests.

Conventional studies of resistance to schooling tend to focus on the 'losers' in a socially mobile world. The working class 'lads' of Paul Willis's classic study (Willis 1978), the subcultures excluded by class, ethnicity or gender (Mahiri 2003) are all offered as examples of how subaltern groups are actually produced (or make themselves) through rejecting the dominant modes of education and are not simply those unable to 'succeed'. Such theories, after all show how failing in education (in conventional terms) works to replicate social groups as determined by labour market needs. However, what is interesting about the literature analysed above is that it too feeds off similar constructs of resistance—of the digital as a subaltern cadre, but ironically with respect to successful social groups and indeed argues that such resistance is paradoxically now necessary to 'really' succeed' in the contemporary world. Is competence in the digital vernacular now part of what used to be called the 'hidden curriculum'—an implicit and often unstated way of behaving and being in education which acted as a route to success? Indeed it is impossible to imagine successful (high achieving) young people who are not highly fluent in this vernacular. And yet in England there is little sense that such fluency is taught or even part of conventional schooling. Young people are clearly responding to wider perceptions of what is in their long-term interests by being conversant in the digital domain and developing forms of subjectivity for work as suggested above. Just as resistance theory has shown us how socially excluded groups use forms of refusal of schooling as preparation for later life, so here young people need to learn how to negotiate different models of successful learning (both in and out of school) despite any explicit or absurd contradiction between each model.

## Bridges, Links and Networks: Metaphors of Connectivity

Whilst the broad theoretical patterns outlined in the first two sections are relatively well established, this section is more speculative and tries to explore the different ways digital learning interventions construct themselves as change initiatives. I am interested here in seeing if it is possible to typologise forms of bridging or linking initiatives that try to connect the informal digital learning described above with the formal school system—especially how they have been constructed by schools or even by regional or national policy. To an extent this is no more than ordering the

range of intentions behind initiatives rather than being able to evaluate their impact as, by definition, most accounts of innovation look different in practice. Nevertheless, in trying to map how this process of 'othering' has been recuperated by the known and the familiar—and of course especially in ways that legitimates a political *status quo*—we see the limits of ambitions for change.

By applying the discipline of the school change literature[7] to this process we are able to draw a wide ranging an deep understanding of change in Education—whereas I suggest much of the rhetoric about digital learning does not draw on the same frameworks of understanding and uses different metrics for calculating effect and change.

Typically, responses to the mounting evidence of the opening two sections of this chapter by State education systems has either been to ignore, proscribe or attempt to recuperate the kinds of knowledge, learning and experiences going on in young peoples lives (or sometimes a confusing mixture of all three). In 2009, a leaked government report in England suggested that Primary age children should learn to use social networking sites like Twitter, and such suggestions were ridiculed in the press. Another good example of this in England would be the series of innovative research reports and software developed by a Government funded initiative, Futurelab[8]. Examples of imaginative geo-positioning software culled from mobile phone use has been developed into curriculum units or studies of student centred curricula based in selected innovation sites[9] offer ways of brokering out-of-school learning with entrenched practices. The kind of learning characterised above is but offered as a kind of bolt-on or additionality to core experiences.

Many initiatives offer kinds of extra-curricular enrichment which might claim all sorts of 'learning dividends'—the best known of these is the 5th Dimension (Cole and Distributed-Literacy-Consortium 2006). That project has its roots in the constructivist epistemology associated with an older vision of computers-in-education and built on the work of Seymour Papert and others. One feature of the new digital learning has been to build on these principles of out of school enrichment, but this can also mean developing the strong cognitive psychology approach that underpins the rationale for such work. However, the culturalist analysis of the new digital media is absent from this older tradition and, although such work brings together even more established progressivist ideas about children and discovery learning, it needs to be disentangled from the current focus. Contemporary versions of this approach, many of which many have been supported in the US by the MacArthur Foundation, [10] offer opportunities for socially excluded young people to experience in a semi-structured and more public way the digital lifestyle enjoyed by their middle class peers from inside the latter's digital bedrooms.

In some respects the crux of the matter comes down to concerns about how to assess 'Net- generation' learning (Burke and Hammett 2009). The Grade 6 curriculum

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[7] For an accessible summary see (Thomson 2007).

[8] http://www.futurelab.org.uk/.

[9] see also: http://www.innovation-unit.co.uk/.

[10] For example: http://iremix.org/.

composed entirely around gaming in the New York experimental school[11] is ground-ed in some of the utopian end-of-schooling ideology inherent in the tradition com-ing out of constructivism, but is welded to a twenty-first Century vision of creative learning and the creative economy. Whether such initiatives can provide a structural rethink across all ages, or whether such work will retreat to younger age groups where there is less concern about terminal assessment and progression into Higher Education, remains to be seen.

In England, much digital learning takes place inside media education spaces where it already has a legitimate educational rationale: and also additionally much digital leaning offer schools unparalleled ways of maintaining a web presence[12] where it is often used to show the dressings of modernity. In some cases digital learning interests are used as a kind of Trojan horse as a legitimate way into subvert-ing more conventional forms of organisation and activity[13]. The modes of incorpo-ration of the informal into the formal are varied and problematic. Mimicking deep change, offering kinds of 'makeover' or additional enrichment activities are after all sensible, cautious and practical ways of introducing activities into schools.

This, of course makes perfect sense. As Gemma Moss (2001) argued in relation to the growth of media education, out-of-school knowledge is 're-contextualised,' using Basil Bernstein's words, by the school, so even if the aim of innovative cur-riculum is to help support students reflect and systematise out of school knowledge, such informal learning becomes recuperated by the formal domain. Moss' argument does not allow for the process of negotiation and resistance that in practice means that such re-contextualisation is neither smooth nor inevitable. There is always a 'cost' to the school in terms of how it changes itself, but the central argument still needs taking on directly. School fulfils a range of social functions; it is key in any social process of stratification and individuation.

In truth, there is, as yet, virtually no evidence about what might be called 'deep change' from the world of compulsory education around the world about how the private leisure driven world of digital leaning may be transforming public education at institutional or system level. Some of this is because digital learning is signifi-cantly individualised and this mode of subjectivity is fundamentally at odds with any State education system. Some of the struggle has revolved around the changing role and skill-set of teachers (Cuban 1986). But in essence, I am suggesting that the argument is not one of practicalities or imagination but is a struggle for discursive legitimacy. The idea of informal learning is a powerful rallying cry as the relation-ship between the individual and the State is reconfigured under changing forms of neoliberal marketisation. The whole idea of informal learning has come into being because of what it is not: mass schooling. We would not consider it a matter of in-terest if there was not so much anxiety and such a struggle for legitimacy in what it means to be educated and what the role of schools are. Indeed I would even suggest that the exotic, the authentic and overly-privileged nature of informal leaning has played its part in destabilising the position of schools in the first place.

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[11] see: http://q2Lkattare.com/node/14.

[12] See for example the excellent work captured at: http://www.tallislab.com/blog.html.

[13] see for example http://www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/enquiring-minds.

Where then does this leave us? I am really suggesting that on one level there is no 'boundary' to be crossed between the formal and the informal—even if there are sets of differing (and similar) social practices; that the idea of a boundary is a rhetorical and political construct. Furthermore, there are a whole set of practical and theoretical problems which mean that if there were a boundary it would be very difficult to cross. It is not surprising that schools and national policy have responded the way they have to the challenges posed by the profile of digital learning; but reform and even change cannot be engineered by any simple import of informal digital learning practices into schools. We should expect a process of recuperation and 'normalisation' that strengthens rather than unsettles the status quo. The interesting future will be when the practices of digital learning are as normal as going to school everyday, when excitement about alleged epistemological ruptures have quietened, and when it loses its 'othering' function. Then we will see the true nature of any 'change'.

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# Chapter 13
# Epilogue

**Victoria Carrington**

In late 2008, a colleague and I sat for a few days in a hotel café in Hong Kong writing the introduction for an edited collection focused on digital literacies. It seemed to us then that the speed of change in digital technologies and the literacy practices that they invited and required was made material in that location at that time.

The field of digital literacies was still emerging and in the collection we attempted to capture some of the key moments and ideas that had become available to that point. In particular, that volume sought to chronicle the shift away from the dominance of print towards a new moment where the digital was well and truly embedded in the everyday and our social practices with text were already moving to rich blends and mixes of multimodality, cross-cutting online and offline, digital and non-digital and creating something new and important. Our aim was to capture a slice of the research going on at this time and to make it accessible to researchers and educators. We very much wanted to show that these shifts were already underway and that these were the practices with technologies and text that young people needed to master if they were to participate fully in the civic, cultural and social worlds in which they lived.

That was then.

This new collection, coming to print only a few years later, shows how much the field has evolved and matured in that short time. While we used Hong Kong as a touchstone and drew our contributors predominantly from the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia this new collection draws partly from Africa to make some important points about the trajectory and impact of digital technologies and the spread of digital literacies since that earlier set of work. As a result, this new collection has the unique appeal of providing the space for a rich and empirically informed conversation between the developed north and the developing south.

In the last few years, concern has coalesced around patterns of access to necessary technology infrastructures and support and to developing pathways to the legitimation of their use by young people in differing geographic and cultural locations.

V. Carrington (✉)
University of East Anglia, Norwich, England
e-mail: V.Carrington@uea.ac.uk

In particular, it highlights the diversity of experience and use that are emerging. In this, the chapters foreground issues of differential access and use, the power of locality and importantly, a critical stance—informed by the decade of research that came before—towards the promise of digital technologies to revolutionize learning and learning relationships.

As a whole, the chapters make clear the interest that youth around the world have in accessing and mastering digital media for their own uses: for building capital to enter imagined communities both local and global, for resisting and speaking back to dominant discourses that assign identities that they find unacceptable, for building identities and skills that link them to others around the globe.

The book represents a move away from the universally hopeful discourses that developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s around the potential of various forms of digital media for literacy and participatory citizenship. Much of this early work was speculative in nature. Individually, and as a whole, the chapters acknowledge that earlier claims for the new types of learning and engagement made available via digital technologies were overly generalized and often problematic. The collection, however, does give substance to the continued global domination of discourses of technology. Individual and national advancement are seen as dependent on building capacity. Youth in Uganda are as keen as those elsewhere to expand their identity and knowledge boundaries and to participate in global flows of information and knowledge. Within this broader discourse, the specificities of how technologies are taken up in diverse local contexts provide localized pathways to these new identities and practices. Youth are increasingly developing social identities via the use of digital media technologies; this is where their voices can be heard.

Here, the collection draws our attention to one of the key insights of the past few years: the experience of access, uptake and impact is not generalizable. Where, what, when, why and by whom matters a great deal. Across numerous chapters the collection highlights that the demonstrable effects of access to digital media have been practices of youth as knowledge producers rather than merely receivers. The examples provided are not drawn from the privileged north. Rather, there are stark examples of the ways in which different groups, in different locations, leverage digital media; they provide a powerful window into the power of digital media as a mode of knowledge production and information sharing for the young. It is here that the book makes a substantial contribution, providing important examples of digital literacies in situ, as everyday practices in the lives of young people in differing geographical, cultural and economic locations. This increasing differentiation reflects the maturation of the field but it will also allow us to develop broader as well as more nuanced optics.

The chapters, individually and as a collective, also push our view of digital communications technologies and digital literacies to include very complex understandings of how diverse media such as translated videos serve as literacy resources and tools for youth living in remote communities. We are reminded to attend to the ways in which digital media are appropriated and customized in local contexts to suit the needs and localized discourses of young people. Digital media are being leveraged in the development of alternative literacy skills in communities where formal

schooling is unavailable or mismatched to local needs. These new alternative literacies are leapfrogging the focus on traditional print based skills that still categorize so much of formal schooling and providing opportunities to develop media and digital literacies more suited to contemporary life.

In our earlier work, we were committed to pushing against educators and policy-makers who worked to quarantine young people from digital literacies and technologies. While there has been improvement, this new volume notes that there is still work to be done. Chapters note the emerging move away from a focus on school-based literacy as print focused towards a more multimodal view, however they also note the continued gap between policy shifts and classroom curricula and the actual requirements of literacy in contemporary communications technology saturated cultures.

Overall, the collection of research highlights the importance of digital practices and media for youth whether they are sitting in classrooms in the privileged north or engaging with alterative and resistance media practices in the developing south. In this, it has moved beyond the earlier concerns captured in 2008, demonstrating the maturing of the field and the increasing sophistication of the research that will guide the development of the field in the next decade. Most appealingly and importantly, the chapters require us to engage with the question of what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century and with all the glorious and fecund diversity that literacies practices around digital technologies invoke.

# Index