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Curation as a New Literacy Practice

Curating, as a verb, incorporates many sub-components and actions; it suggests at least the following: collecting, cataloguing, arranging and assembling for exhibition, displaying. As well as the institutional and professional contexts for such work through the centuries and across cultures, many people have made personal collections of texts and artefacts that have stood for them in the world, in some ways, as representing a nexus of relationships, affiliations and markers of identity (Miller, 2008). As with so many aspects of life and cultural practices we should not expect people's use of digital media to do anything other than change significantly the ways in which curation operates. Indeed it has been suggested that curation itself is now a metaphorical new literacy practice which incorporates the collection, production and exhibition of markers of identity through time in both digital production and social media (Potter, 2012). Such curated media collections and performances are provisional and contingent, permanent or transient and involve varying degrees of agency on the part of the end user, along with risk, opportunity and personal efficacy. For all ages this involves engaging and developing skills and dispositions which enable agency in some way; curatorship is to curation as authorship is to writing. New or adapted skill sets in new media are nascent in people of all ages but suggest certain ways of being and learning for younger people in formal or informal settings of learning. For the purposes of this special issue in *E-learning and Digital Media* we are defining curation/curatorship in new media as a distinctive new literacy practice and we are exploring through the articles the ways in which this impacts on, or is evidenced in, activity in a variety of spaces.

For this special issue, with one exception in the range of articles, we are interested in the ways in which issues around identity and self-representation are emerging in the

practices of youth engagement with digital media. We are particularly concerned with how curatorship, as a kind of authorship with digital media, is driven by social actors' agency across a wide range of sites and media. We understand this process as a self-reflexive process where young people develop a learning identity (Erstad et al., 2009; Erstad & Sefton-Green, 2013) as they collect, re-arrange and exhibit media assets on a wide range of different sites. Consequently, we understand curatorship and learning identity in new media as an emerging literacy practice in which young people's agentive activity is performed *in* and *on* the world.

Whereas in earlier times, the apposite verbs used to credit an author would have been simply "written," "edited," or even "created," it is quite clear that they don't capture all the self-representational activities or *practices* in digital culture that the verb "curated" does. This is because *curating* a space is not only about writing or creating within it but also collecting, distributing, assembling, disassembling, and moving it across different stages. Firstly, collecting resources for self-representation refers to assets that you create yourself, or resources you find and remix with inter-textual references (Potter, 2012). Secondly, cataloguing these resources involves understanding how to re-arrange and use these user-generated folksonomies as opposed to author-generated taxonomies (Davies and Merchant, 2007). Thirdly, these resources must be in dialogue with one another, in order to exhibit a specific meaning for an audience. In digital media production this is an active process of working with digital editing tools in the software to assemble a coherent whole (Burn, 2003; Gilje, 2010). In social media this may mean mixing self-produced material alongside curated media assets to produce new and contingent meanings (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Curatorship defined and understood in this way allows users to control, select and publish aspects of their performed, recorded self in new media; and we can see here an essential life skill; the management of resources and assets made for, by and about us in a range of media.

In issuing the original call for papers in this special issue of *E-learning and Digital Media*, we as co-editors placed special emphasis on how curatorship relates to identity work, and more specific learning identity as it goes to the heart of learning-to-learn. We are particularly interested in how young people develop learning identities throughout their engagement with digital media, either if this engagement is friendship or interest-driven (Ito et al. 2010, Barron, 2014).

The call yielded over a dozen abstracts from authors around the world who engage in

these issues in their research. We invited in particular these authors to engage in youth cultures and cultures of digital production to submit their articles in order to further explore instances of learner´s engagement with practices of self-representation and self-curation in social and new media. The result is this special issue, which includes eight unique and original contributions from the US, Europe (including Scandinavia) as well as Australia.

The majority of contributions are based on ethnographic studies of young people's engagement with digital media production in schools, as well as out of school. Across the articles you will find curatorship discussed as a performative act in digital media production, but also as a performance in related research data, such as interviews. Partly this is a question of expanding our understanding of curatorship as a metaphor for self-presentation with digital media, and partly it is a question of how research methodology can be developed and enlarged to understand how young people curate themselves in the context of being interviewed in research projects. In terms of the latter, methodology is not the main topic of this special issue. However, some of the authors discuss how the term curatorship may work as a way to understand the identity issues involved in the specific relationship that emerge between researchers and young people as they talk about issues related to the young persons digital production. By that we mean that we are also exploring and reflecting on some of the epistemological and theoretical concerns that underpin how we can observe, describe, and understand process of curatorship in qualitative research.

Curating this special issue: each article and what it contributes to the whole

Each article in this collection contributes from a socio-cultural or psychological perspective some original piece of research which examines production and curation in digital media; our hope is that they operate intertextually to make some new meanings and begin to help theorise this area.

The first paper discusses the unprecedented opportunities for production and collaborative working in social media, from a psychological and contextual perspective. *Terras, Ramsey and Boyle* consider the potential for psychosocial development which is afforded by production in online contexts. They argue that a more detailed understanding of the psychological determinants of online content creation is required,

opposing research to date, which has mostly explored the demographic factors that influence production. In particular, they propose that these psychological insights are best explored from an ecological perspective to enable consideration of the role of both the context of production and individual skills on the part of the producers of such content. Their further aim is to show how this work can inform policy and practice concerning digital inclusion and web safety, speaking directly to concerns which are widespread in the discussion of digital media.

Terras, Ramsey and Boyle's work is followed by three empirical research papers, drawing on socio-cultural perspectives on young people's engagement with digital media production in different school contexts. *Dezuanni, O´Mara and Beavis* investigate the processes of identity construction that occur as a group of girls undertake practices of curatorship to display their knowledge of *Minecraft* through discussion of the game, both 'in world' and in face-to-face interactions. The article reviews relevant work on digital cultures and literacy practices before exploring the ways in which *Minecraft* could be an exemplary instance of a digital game that promotes and enables complex practices of digital participation. The authors conclude by outlining the implications of our investigation for the conceptualization of learning spaces as affinity groups and for considering digital participation as a space in which to develop curatorship.

Film production, learner identity and curatorship is the main focus in these studies and from *Doerr-Stevens* comes a report on work from a small, public, New York City high school. In this case study, filmmaking was explored as an opportunity for youth engaged in the work to make visible a range of local and global affiliations, creating a sense of belonging and deeper knowing in increasingly diverse learning contexts. By using mediated discourse analysis (Norris, 2004), the author explores digital production as a process of assemblage and re-arrangement of different semiotic resources such as sound, image, transitions, special effects, etc. to become the objects, which are composed into scenes. These processes are discussed as curatorship as these completed media texts become cultural artifacts that communicate affiliation and social position which recalls and counterpoints other work in the field on digital media and learner identity (Merchant, 2005; Potter, 2012). Similar issues are at stake in *Dejaynes* analysis of media makers in a yearlong study following students in an English class in a high school in the midwestern region of the US. She focuses on the social and multimodal struggle within

digital media composition as conducted in two classrooms in this ethnically diverse urban high school with over 2000 students and invokes theories of "cosmopolitanism" in the discussion.

The final article in this first part of the special issue takes a look in the mirror as it combines research results from a range of projects with two consistent themes. Firstly, *McDougall and Potter* explore the potential for curation to offer a productive metaphor for the convergence of digital media learning across and between home / life world and formal educational / systemworld spaces – or between the public and private spheres. Secondly, they draw conclusions from these projects to argue that the acceptance of transmedia literacy practices as a site for rich educational work – in media education and related areas – can only succeed if matched by a convergence of a more *porous* educator-student expertise. At the end of the article they give three recommendations for curating media learning in the digital age.

As a starting point in the second part of this special issue, *Gilje* and *Groeng* also explore film production, but in this paper they pay more attention to how the filmmakers develop a learning identity across contexts as they make their way into the creative business of filmmaking. The article, which draws on data collected over four years, explores how five young adults (two female and three male) positioned themselves as aspiring filmmakers in the cultural and creative sector. The analysis pays attention to how the filmmakers position themselves by identifying styles and genres they work with, and the authors illustrate how their identity as filmmakers is negotiated when reflecting upon filmmaking as a community of practice. By drawing on the concept of 'figured worlds' (Holland, 1998), the authors aim to illustrate how the young filmmakers in both processes perform identity work. Thinking about curatorship in methodological terms the authors discuss the interviews as a prerequisite for how the filmmakers can curate themselves as professional filmmakers in the future. Curatorship in interviews with researchers is then an exercise in doing PR for these young filmmakers. This topic has some similarity with the methodological issues discussed by Dezuanni and colleagues article above and both articles raise questions for how such work can be taken forward in the future.

The penultimate article in this edition builds on a research project that investigates how students in teacher education use both the Learning Management System (LMS) and social media (in this case, Facebook) in their collaborative learning. The findings

indicate that the students preferred organizing collaborative processes through Facebook groups rather than through the LMS at the University in the southern part of Norway, and shows how they created a space between formal and informal learning, mediated by what the researchers term 'power users'. These users are characterised by the ways in which they perform a "curative function" on behalf of the group. Furthermore, the quality of the processes seemed to depend on how the assignments where designed for different modes and for individual or group work. *Birkeland, Drange and Tønnessen* argue that these insights are important to take into consideration for teacher education in order to improve an awareness of didactic design for students entering their future profession as teachers.

The final article has a future-oriented meta-perspective on curatorship as it explores how elderly people are knitting together the fragmented and scattered 'data' of life experience into private and public narratives. *Manchester* and *Facer* present two studies. The first part concerns a case study of three community filmmakers working with an artist to create a film based on their peers' experiences as first generation Caribbean immigrants to the UK; the second part reports and reflects on three workshops and five detailed case studies which together explore how older adults use existing 'data' to recollect, to curate and to reflect on their lives and learning for personal purposes.

Final remark: Curating a special issue

Editing this issue of "E-Learning and digital media" is an act of curation in itself, placing a collection online for exhibition, discussion and dissemination. We are aware of differing perspectives, intellectual positions and disciplines in its construction and assembly. Each piece invites further research and debate which we hope will have a life beyond the publication of this issue. The area is methodologically and even ethically challenging but the work produced by these different researchers in their differing contexts represents a serious attempt to describe a new literacy practice with potential for complex representations through agentive, curative activity throughout the life-course. The word "complex" is used deliberately because this is not about being wholly "celebratory", even though the social actors' achievements in the sphere of self-advocacy and self-efficacy are clear in several studies. It is an attempt to present and contextualise a variety of studies and to set out some suggestions for more work which

recognises the complexity of the development of "curatorship" in new media and the exploration of "curation" as a practice through the life-course and across all contexts.

In concluding, we as editors would like to thank the authors for all their work and their patience with the review and publication process. We would also like to express our gratitude to the dozen peer reviewers for their anonymous but invaluable contributions.

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JOHN POTTER is a Senior Lecturer in Education and New Media at the London Knowledge Lab in the Department of Culture, Communication and Media at the Institute of Education, University of London. He is a founder member of the DARE collaborative (Digital Arts Research in Education) whose mission is to explore the relationship between digital media arts production and learning. His research and publications are in the fields of: digital video production by young learners (the focus of his doctoral research); the use of social software and online networks for publication and learning; media education, new literacies, creative activity and learner agency; the changing nature of teaching and learning in response to the pervasive use in wider culture of media technologies in formal and informal settings. His most recent publication in the field which advanced a theory of curation as a meta-level authorship and new literacy practice was published by Palgrave in New York at the end of 2012: *Digital Media and Learner Identity: The new curatorship.*

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the journal *Written Communication* (2010). As a Post Doc and senior researcher, Gilje has elaborated these perspectives in the research projects *Learning Lives* (2009-2013) and *Knowledge in Motion* (2012-2015), studying learner identity and learning trajectories in literacy practices across contexts of learning.

Recent publications are *Art, Crafts, Technology and Design* [Kunst, håndverk, teknologi & design] (Lepperød, Kallestad & Gilje, 2013) and book chapters in *Learning, identity and community in the Digital Age* (Erstad & Sefton-Green, 2012), *New Voices in Norwegian Educational Research* (Bjørnestad & Stray Heldal, 2013) and *Multimodality in Writing* (Archer & Breuer, 2014).

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