Framing the terms and conditions of digital life: new ways to view 'known' practices and digital/media literacy

A thread runs through this issue of re-examining practices, especially those around teaching and learning, in a number of spaces, in the light of the pervasive nature of the digital, by reference to a series of frames which usually reside in other domains of enquiry. They challenge us to think differently about the prevailing terms and conditions under which we operate in relation to the lived experience of learning in the digital age. Some of them offer borrowings from other theories and knowledge domains which are re-presented as ways of making the familiar strange, ways of 'othering' digital media in education so that we can look at it more critically and engage with some of the prevailing backdrop of platforms and new media industries of various kinds. This seems to me to be the best use of any kind of research in the field, not to validate the hype around an endlessly deferred future of teaching and learning in the digital age, but to question our changing understanding of it in response to the dynamic and sometimes dramatic shifts in perception of a whole range of previously held values around the very purposes of teaching and learning in any age. Two articles in *Learning Media and Technology* in particular provide useful examples of this kind of thinking when it comes to resetting the agenda for digital and/or media literacy education.

Firstly, in this issue, Selwyn, Nemorin and Johnson (2017), explore the varying disconnects which teachers experience as the digital permeates professional life and changes the nature of their relationship to their labour. Here, the re-examination centres on taking apart the assumptions and hype around the changes to relations to their labour and the experience of these teachers is problematised and critiqued across a range of 'disjnuctures'.

Secondly, in a forthcoming article by Williamson (2017) the backdrop is an examination of a different kind of disconnect which invites us to explore a social media/data-harvesting platform entering the complex ecosystem of classroom, teaching and learning; to understand the world in this way is not simply to react to these happenings but to suggest that we need a new kind of proactive engagement with it through research. Data has melted into the foreground of the classroom setting, from its position as guarantor of progress through measurement and access to events and spaces, to its position as arbiter of a far wider range of effects and consequences.

In both of these pieces, as a result of the re-framings and explorations of the life of data, the life of the digital in the context of education, how do we now understand what it means to be digitally literate or media literate? I'm using the two terms, digital and media literacy, somewhat interchangeably here, though this has been the subject of much debate, with the former often characterised as instrumental and even deterministic, and the latter as concerned with how meanings are made when media texts are circulated, consumed and

remediated. They do, of course, arise from different antecedents, even though, taken together, they imply a way of exploring and understanding learning and social practices in the digital age and they do, perhaps, find a conjunction in the attention being paid to 'making' as literacy in informal spaces (Willett, 2017). For a long time, in fact, there have been arguments made about enlarging our understanding of what it means to be literate in the digital age. But if our aim is to do this, then we need to get beyond an instrumental version of literacy which resides in a static and autonomous form and we need to start thinking about a whole range of curricular experiences, discussions, debates and provocations which encourage us to incorporate what we know of digital life, platforms and institutions into the learning experience. This has, after all, long been a key aim of new literacy studies, to suggest an ideological literacy education.

We can no longer think in terms of an uncomplicated way about flows of texts, practices and artefacts, nor in simple binaries of production and consumption. We must find new ways of understanding how the work we do, the lives we lead, are consumed and (re)produced in the digital media environments in which we willingly (or otherwise) swim every day. The prevailing media culture, and the platforms which dominate and converge within it, increasingly hail us as learners, readers, consumers, labourers in particular ways and we mis-recognise ourselves in the myriad ways in which these roles are reflected back to us on the screen. The impact which this has on the daily experience of school, or not-school, has a major shaping effect on the lived experience of all of us, as well as on future wellbeing and even societal change and our political futures.

The best research in the field, as Selwyn suggested (2012) , asks what is new here but also makes things visible and to re-problematises them. The work of teachers in the light of the digital, becomes a site of struggle and ownership of labour and labouring identity. The connections between home and school as mediated by the platforms which operate across both domains become the site of some difficult questions about ownership, control and consent. The agreements which we make as we sign up and click through the various terms and conditions are inadequate for the times. We certainly need more clarity about what lies behind "I agree" and how this becomes "I am a consumer and a learner." And about what exactly the terms and conditions of learning in the digital age are.

In some ways, the research presented in these articles and in others is predicated on being able to switch the analysis much more flexibly, but with rigour and analysis, between the micro, meso and macro of networked life. There may be an argument also about needing to include a personal and diachronic element which explores our media histories and 'lifeworlds' through time. Certainly, curation theory needs to develop further to make arguments not only about the about freedom of expression and agency in online spaces but also about how we are ourselves curated into existence on the various platforms we use. In many ways, this is a return to a version of understanding media effects from a pre-digital version of media studies and it will do for understanding the economic and social imperatives around what appears to be new, but is really just the familiar structures of global capitalism at work. But in quite profound ways, these effects are experienced entirely differently in the era of the all pervasive digital platform; when, for example, Google brings to market a camera -Google Clips - which takes 15-shot bursts of you, your family and friends while you are not looking, chosen by the camera itself, as determined by its own

reading of the situation, the faces around it, learned by its own on-board Artificial Intelligence over time. Currently this device is marketed as something that parents will want more than anyone else, to collect hundreds of un-posed and realistic photos of, for example, their children at play. Although Google insists that the pictures stay in camera for now unless uploaded, it is entirely possible to imagine that these devices will have wide applications across social media in education. When the dynamic literacy practices of the age throw such artefacts and social arrangements into new configurations, how should we, as researchers of learning, media and technology respond? One step to take is to follow the lead of researchers such as Selwyn and Williamson and others into a critical engagement with digital media technology. Perhaps this research will lead all of us to reconsider the terms and conditions for education in the digital age.

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