

Chapter 59

Digital Media and Cosmopolitan Critical Literacy: Research and Practice

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter I consider contemporary global conditions pointing to what some scholars term “a global risk society” where digital media and Cosmopolitan Critical Literacy offer a counterpoint to human rights, health, climate, and terrorist threats. By examining current research in global youth communication across nation-state boundaries via the Internet, existing research suggests that tapping into digital media literacy and critical media literacy will be crucial for developing an informed and critical citizenry. At present, studies of transnational youth navigating old and new affiliations across national borders are in their infancy. Nevertheless, the existing research holds promise for developing global world citizens who can realize an ethos of cosmopolitan, critical citizenship through the affordances of digital media.

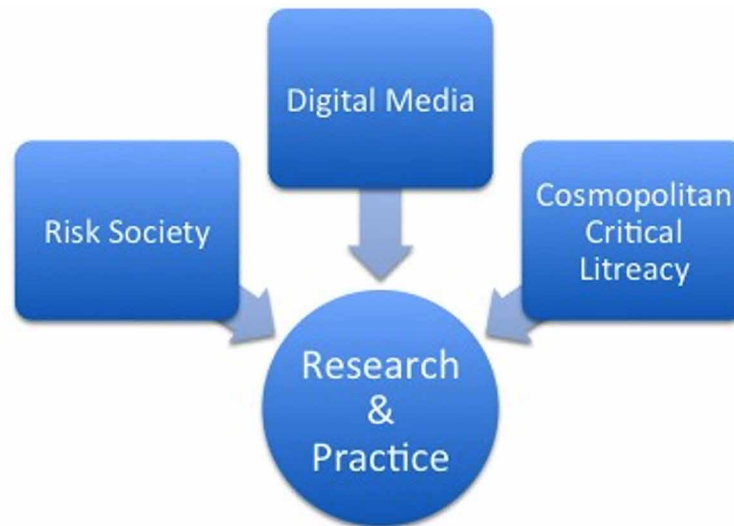
INTRODUCTION

Digital media permeate nearly all aspects of our lives from the connectedness of our families and communities through cell phones, tablets, computers at home, on the road, in the kitchen, and at work. The present chapter considers the impact of digital media and Cosmopolitan Critical Literacy (CCL) (Dunkerly-Bean, Bean, & Alnajjar, 2014) on the development of an astute citizenry capable of critiquing public policies, human rights, and elements of a “risk society” (Beck & Sznaider, 2010; Delanty, 2006). I begin by providing an overview of ongoing scholarly work aimed at defining the interplay of the three elements (risk society, digital media, and CCL) by first considering what it means to live in a global, risk society (see Figure 1).

Following this section, critical literacy is considered along with an expanded notion of cosmopolitan theory and Cosmopolitan Critical Literacy (CCL). Critical literacy is often confused with its older sibling, critical reading, making it imperative that the very different stances underpinning critical reading

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Figure 1. Risk society, digital media, critical cosmopolitan literacy, research and practice



and critical literacy are clearly defined (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2001; Stevens & Bean, 2007). Research incorporating these elements and digital media is reviewed with an eye toward how this work might guide our practice in a global context.

In essence, I argue that a global risk society overlaps with a need to develop an astute global citizenry able to collaborate and solve serious problems including war, climate change, racism, sexism, identity theft, and a host of other issues facing the planet. Figure 1 shows the three major elements considered in this chapter.

BACKGROUND

Defining a Global Risk Society

Globalization involves the increasingly fluid and borderless movement of people, ideas, information, and capital that position the global and local as mutually interdependent (Beck & Sznaider, 2010). In this environment the Internet affords an increasingly connected, transnational youth culture (Hull & Stornaiulo, 2010). This increasingly interconnected world society supports positive elements in the form of cultural exchange, as well as negative dimensions including terrorism, disease, and climate change (Trepanier & Habib, 2011). Sociologist Ulrich Beck (2012) argues that our successes and hubris in harnessing nuclear energy, developing advanced weaponry, and producing global warming place us at risk. Beck and other European scholars (Strydom, 2002) note that we now live in a global “risk society” where it will be crucial to develop an informed, critical citizenry. Because of the increasingly powerful Internet, individuals and groups of citizens can examine, deconstruct, and critique geopolitical and local policies.

To get a sense of how profound a change in communication technologies the Internet is, consider that every two years computer power doubles, rendering our cell phones more powerful than all of NASA when it placed two men on the moon in 1969 (Kaku, 2014).

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