Chapter 7
Facilitating Multimodal Literacy Instruction Through Digital Curation

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ABSTRACT

It is becoming clearer that multimodal literacies (specifically textual, visual, and digital) will frame classroom instruction for the near future. The mission of this chapter is to highlight the potential of digital curation as a means for facilitating multimodal literacy instruction and the subsequent creation of dynamic digital learning resources by both students and teachers. Over the past several decades, there has been a tremendous shift in how educators and students communicate, learn, and share ideas. As society moves more toward creating and sharing information through the aggregation, filtering, and customization of digital content, it is imperative that educators create opportunities for students to do likewise. Drawing on recent research on the cognitive benefits of multimodal literacy instruction and its potential for increasing opportunities for student engagement, this chapter will provide a rationale for, and subsequently sketch, a practical approach for teaching collaborative digital curation using Web 2.0 resources.

INTRODUCTION

The term *literacy* can encompass a wide range of comprehension activities and modes of communication. However, as one delves more into the study of literacy in today's society, the more the term *digital literacy* appears. Digital literacy generally refers to the ability to understand and create electronically distributed media such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, and tweets. The notion that digitally literate people not only understand but also create a medium should excite educators because of the opportunity to fully engage students and help them to succeed and thrive in a world dominated by digital communication. What makes the teaching and learning of digital literacy so difficult, though, is the rapidly changing nature of what constitutes digital content. Although email existed 10 years ago, tweets did not. Wikis and

blogs may have existed as long as the Internet has been in the mainstream, but what will the students of tomorrow be reading and creating 10 years from now? Digital literacy is a socially-constructed multi-modal literacy, one that spans print (textual), visual, and other forms of literacies, and, like others of the so-called "new literacies," is a constantly changing concept (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu,2008). Embracing this constant change is part of being a digitally literate person, one who connects and builds upon a multitude of other literacies to extend one's understanding or even create new meaning.

The central message of this chapter is that digital content creation offers students opportunities to engage in multimodal literacy that engenders collaborative meaning-making, and curation is a process that effectively frames this process. The objectives of this chapter include the following: (a) articulate the nature of digital literacy and its importance in today's society, (b) explain how textual, visual, and interface literacy all serve as co-constructs of digital literacy, and thus require specific comprehension strategies themselves, (c) argue that digital content curation offers teachers a dynamic, engaging opportunity to teach digital literacy, and (d) present possible hindrances to effective implementation of digital content curation and how to overcome them.

BACKGROUND

Information in today's society is increasingly being shared primarily through audiovisual digital content, hyperlinked web pages and e-books, SMS (text) and MMS (multimedia) messages, RSS feeds, adaptive gameplay, tweets, and Facebook status updates. The Internet has become the dominant medium for this shift and has prompted many to consider the importance of increasing the focus on multiple literacies in preparing students for success in contemporary society (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leander, 2008). In today's Internet information culture, literacy spans not only multimodality in the forms of text, images, and audio-visual elements, but also dynamic features that redefine themselves based on user-input and the user's interaction with others through social media. The drawback of the Internet is the vastness of information and the general lack of focused resource platforms that are dynamic, student-centered, and socially interactive, and that also facilitate appropriate levels of multimodal literacy instruction (Rosen-baum, 2011). Digital curation appears to be an approach that may help harness Internet resources in such a way and help frame an inquiry-based pedagogy geared toward student engagement and multimodal literacy comprehension.

Digital curation is the sifting and aggregating of Internet and other digital resources into a manageable collection of what teachers and students find relevant, personalized, and dynamic. It retains the constantly updated components of the Internet while providing a repository that is easily accessible and usable. The beauty of digital curation is that it can be teacher-directed or student-directed. As teachers, we can develop dynamic, interactive social resources that supplant mundane textbooks containing outdated information. Students can develop their own customized resources as well, drawing from all aspects of the Internet to build their own anthology of video, news feeds, Twitter streams (and whatever else is pertinent and engaging) that allows them an outlet for inquiry-based projects as well as a personalization of the curriculum.

Teachers and administrators must not only engage in an aggressive pursuit of information itself, but also strive to create an accessible platform that presents the information dynamically and reliably. The collection, analysis, categorization, evaluation, and synthesis of the information must reflect the rapidly changing nature of the Internet, but be easily accessible and usable. This is the reason why having one

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