

Chapter 5

Literacies on the Web: Co-Production of Literary Texts on Fan Fiction Sites

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the authors discuss and informal learning settings such as fan fiction sites and their relations to teaching and learning within formal learning settings. Young people today spend a lot of time with social media built on user generated content. These media are often characterized by participatory culture which offers a good environment for developing skills and identity work. In this chapter the authors problematize fan fiction sites as informal learning settings where the possibilities to learn are powerful and significant. They also discuss the learning processes connected to the development of literacies. Here the rhetoric principle of “imitatio” plays a vital part as well as the co-production of texts on the sites, strongly supported by the beta reader and the power of positive feedback. They also display that some fans, through the online publication of fan fiction, are able to develop their craft in a way which previously have been impossible.

INTRODUCTION

Young people today spend a lot of time communicating and socializing via digital media. The so called social medias have become a big and impor-

tant part of many children's and teen-agers' lives. Through a number of communities on the Internet, they find new and old friends all over the world with whom they share the same interest, values and attitudes (f.e. Medierådet 2008; Livingstone & Bober 2005; Sjöberg 2002). In this chapter we explore some learning processes related to being

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a contributor to these web communities, often known as informal learning settings. We have a specific focus on competences involving reading and writing skills, so called literacies.

Grownups sometimes wonder, not only *what* children or students are doing on the computer, but also *why* they spend so much time there. The answer is simple: Internet and web communities offer things that young people desire and find meaningful to be a part of. First of all, not every child and teenager is an expert and a virtuoso on the computer. Not everyone even has one! In Sweden today however, the spread and access to computers and the Internet is very high among young people (Findahl & Zimic 2008; Findahl 2009a and 2009b). Some young people are more active than others, and for the individual the time spent on the computer and the Internet can change over time. At times school, sports or other interests take up most of their spare time. However, for a lot of Swedish kids Internet is a vital part and there are no signs that the impact that the Web has on young people's everyday life is declining. On the contrary the trend is quite the opposite. *What* you do on digital media might differ but time spent on the same media is increasing (Medierådet 2008; Findahl 2009a and 2009b).

Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants

One way of understanding young people's engagement at different web communities is the difference between the so called messenger generation and the (often) older "mail generation" (Selg & Findahl 2008). Here we would like to emphasize that difference in using the Web doesn't have to be connected with age at all – primarily it has to do with using habits and attitudes to the Internet.

However, a lot of young people can be described as what sometimes is called "digital natives", having the language of the computer and of Internet as a mother tongue (Prensky 2001). The digital natives have developed Internet based skills

and competences without taking a detour around older analogue technologies. Their competences differ radically from the so called digital immigrants who were not born into the digital world but gained their digital media skills later in life.

It is not necessary though, that the digital natives have more knowledge than the digital immigrants. But the two groups and various generations certainly have different skills and act differently on the Web (Prensky 2001; Selg & Findahl 2008). For example, the digital immigrants have difficulties in fully accomplishing the digital language and don't use the Internet as a first hand source for information etc. In comparison to the messenger generation who practically always is on-line and therefore often use this way of communicating, the mail generation prefer e-mail and telephone when contacting others (Selg & Findahl 2008). Using the computer as a main tool when reading and writing, the digital natives might change, not only their way of dealing with literacies, but also notions about the traditional way of regarding printed texts and books as something representing a high cultural value.

Fan Fiction as an Informal Learning Setting

Then, what is different from before? And what impact does the new media landscape have on learning processes related to reading and writing on the Web? First of all, digital media technique has radically changed the possibilities for people to find, create, process and distribute cultural products. Today, instead of a few strong actors, a lot of people can be active in producing culture and spreading information at a number of levels. The changing role of the consumer is obvious in practically all digitalized forms of culture – music, film, computer games, news and books (Brynjolfsson, Hu & Smith 2003; Jenkins 1992 & 2008; Tapscott 1996).

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