



Strand Statement

Background

The social and cultural landscape in which youth grow up today is one marked by the pervasive presence of digital media. This particular generation of youth, referred to as *Homo zappiens* by Veen & Vrakking (2006), has grown up using multiple technological devices from early childhood. They consider schools as disconnected institutions, more or less irrelevant to them as far as their daily lives are concerned.

Escalating levels of disengagement from education in formal learning settings arise, at least in part, from youth finding that traditional schooling experiences are not personally relevant, meaningful, or efficacious. They have minimal room to exercise agency and control. Consequently, they derive little efficacy and pleasure from schooling.

The solution, however, is not “simply to import an array of digital literacies holus bolus into classrooms on the grounds that they are ‘engaging’” (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008, p. 9). The challenge, rather, is to create environments where media and technologies, literacy, learning, meaning (semantic and existential), and experiences of agency, efficacy, and pleasure can be brought together in productive ways that respect students’ experience of digital media embeddedness in a manner that does not over-privilege textual (in the narrow, symbolic sense) representation.

Strand Focus

The New Media & New Literacies Strand, located within the Informal & Formal Learning Research Program, attempts to create and investigate learning ‘spaces’ that foster the development of new literacies in light of pervasive new media.

Following Lister, Dovey, Grant, and Kelly (2003), new media may be construed as covering:

- *new textual (in the broad sense) experiences*: new kinds of genre, textual form, entertainment, pleasure, and patterns of media consumption (e.g. videogames, special effects cinema)
- *new ways of representing the world*: working with media that offer new representational possibilities and experiences (e.g. immersive virtual environments)
- *new relationships between subjects (users and consumers) and media technologies*: innovatively changing the use and reception of image and communication media in everyday life and in the meanings that are invented in and through media technologies
- *new experiences of the relationship between embodiment, identity, and community*: shifts in the personal and social experience of time, space, and place (on both local and global scales) which have implications for the ways in which we experience ourselves and our place in the world

- *new conceptions of the biological body's relationship to technological media*: dealing with challenges to received distinctions between the human and the artificial, between nature and technology, between body and media-based technological prostheses, between the real and the virtual
- *new patterns of organization and production*: wider realignments and integrations in media culture, industry, economy, access, ownership, control and regulation

Moving beyond early, restrictive notions of literacy that concentrate on the ability to read and write largely as operational skills, we adopt a sociocultural perspective that views new literacies in terms of situated social *practices*. Following Scribner and Cole (1981), literacies involve applying knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of (always social) use. As Gee, Hull, and Lankshear (1996) stress: reading is always reading *something* with *understanding*. This something that one reads with understanding is always a text of *a certain type* that is read in *a certain way*. The same holds true for writing. Thus, new literacies should be conceived in terms of a myriad of social practices and conceptions of engaging in meaning making mediated by texts (in the broad sense) that are produced, received, distributed, and exchanged via digital codification (Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). Underlying such social practices are not only the ways in which people *read* texts, but also how they *talk* about such texts in certain ways, *hold certain beliefs and values* about them, and *socially interact* over them in certain ways. Texts, in short, are parts of *lived, talked, enacted, value-and-belief laden* practices carried out in specific places at specific times (Gee et al., 1996). Examples of such textual practices include digital remix, fan fiction, blogging, social networking, e-journaling, gaming, creating machinima, and developing digital animations. Each of these practices has its own set of subpractices. Hence, blogging from the perspective of a citizen journalist is a distinct practice from blogging to critique mainstream broadcasting of news events (which will likely have a political bent).

For the purpose of this document (in the context of OER/NIE), New Literacies are defined as the *critical* and *creative* mastery of new media in the social practices of personal, civic, and professional life. A critical orientation focuses on (1) ideology critique and analyzing the politics of crucial dimensions including gender, race, and class, (2) incorporating alternative media production, and (3) expanding textual analyses to include social context, control, and pleasure (Macedo & Steinberg, 2007). Such an orientation is essential to developing a questioning and inquiring stance toward epistemological issues concerning the construction of knowledge and toward fostering a deep and personal sense of self-reflexivity. The critical orientation, thus, seeks to help youth develop as **digital epistemologists**. The orientation toward creativity seeks to enculturate youth to the new media arts (Rush, 2005; Tribe & Jana, 2006) and to foster creative abilities in respect of new media. An orientation toward creation and creativity develops students beyond the level of critical consumers of new media; it further exposes them to the need to also be critical producers of new media. This second orientation, then, is directed at helping youth to develop as **creative natives**.

The two-fold goal of helping youth **learn to be** (Semetsky, 2006) digital epistemologists and creative natives may be usefully viewed against the backdrop disciplines of popular culture (Fiske, 1989), cultural studies (Barker, 2008), and critical theory (Tyson, 2006). These disciplines provide useful perspectives for framing the study of new literacy practices. Seen in this light, issues related to discourse (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), performance (Schechner, 2003), identity (Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998), and power (Collins & Blot, 2003; Faubion, 2000) become especially salient.

For an extended exposition on new literacies, see Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, and Leu (2008) and Lankshear and Knobel (2006).

Research Orientation and Questions

The approach to research adopted in this strand is located along the axes of the socio-cultural (Cole, Engeström, & Vasquez, 1997), the social constructionist (Gergen, 1999, 2001), and the participatory/developmental (Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Rogoff & Lave, 1984).

Following Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007), we are interested in the phenomenon of learning, whether in formal or informal contexts and spaces, and whether in school or beyond the boundaries of school. Learning, they argue, both involves and requires *participation* in something. It is motivated by a need to understand something, be it an act, a word, or a sensory experience. Learning always leaves a residue: it makes a mark on the participant. Learning thus draws from, constitutes, and is constituted by “histories of participation” covering other spaces at other times and with other people. From this perspective, learning can be conceived of as always being situated in participation, but it is not synonymous with or reducible to participation. The role of power becomes especially pertinent because power is produced and enacted in and through discourses, relationships, activities, spaces, and times by people as they compete for access to and control of resources, tools, and identities.

Based on the foregoing, some relevant research questions from an identity and agency perspective (Lewis et al., 2007) include:

1. How are students’ experiences and subjectivities incorporated into or shut out of the learning activity?
2. How are their different identities recognized by other participants in the activity?
3. What cultural modes or ways of knowing are invoked in the activity and how do these models and Discourses frame identities and opportunities for agency?
4. What are the moments of agency—strategic making and remaking of self as well as the material conditions surrounding the making of self—afforded in this exchange?

The above list is illustrative only and is by no means exhaustive.

Examples of NMNL Research

In school:

- Multimodal literacies [see, e.g., Jewitt and Kress (2003), Kress (2003, 2006), Pahl and Rowsell (2005, 2006)]
- Game-based learning [see, e.g., Ferdig (2009), Gee (2007a, 2007b)]
- Augmented reality games using mobile devices [see, e.g., Klopfer (2008)]
- Digital storytelling [see, e.g., Ohler (2007)]

Beyond school:

- Fan fiction [see, e.g., Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) , Hellekson and Busse (2006)]
- Girls and media [see, e.g., Kearney (2006), Mazzarella (2005)]
- Massively multiplayer online role playing games [see, e.g., Corneliussen and Rettberg (2008), Williams, Ducheneaut, Xiong, Zhang, Yee, and Nickell (2006)]
- Social life in Second Life [see, e.g., Boelstorff (2008), Ludlow and Wallace (2007)]

- New media in civic life [see, e.g., (Bennett, 2008; Buckingham, 2008)]
- Popular culture and subcultures [see, e.g., Jenkins (2006), Ulrich and Harris (2003)]
- Youth online [see, e.g., Thomas (2007)]
- Gaming life and culture [see, e.g., (Selfe & Hawisher, 2007; J. P. Williams & Smith, 2007)]
- Mobile device-based practices in social and public spaces [see, e.g., Ito (Ito, Okabe, & Matsuda, 2006)]
- Creativity and new media arts [see, e.g., (Greene, 2004; Paul, 2003; Rush, 2005)]

The above list is meant to be illustrative only.

Research projects carried out to date at NIE include (1) game-based learning projects [*Space Station Leonis* (social studies/National Education), *Escape from Centauri 7* (dynamics of charged particles), *Legends of Alkhimia* (lower secondary chemistry), and *Statecraft X* (social studies using mobile phone game)], (2) learning in immersive virtual environments (Quest Atlantis and Second Life), (3) living online and the construction of identity/body, and (4) digital storytelling in informal learning environments. Projects on learning in informal environments complement the research that is conducted in schools. Together, they help us to construct a more complete understanding of learning in informal and formal spaces, as well as *across* these spaces. The projects conducted in formal environments push the boundaries of pedagogy and technology, while those conducted in informal environments address vital facets of human learning typically overlooked in schools. A critical challenge in the work of the New Media & New Literacies strand is to explore how more holistic aspects of human learning related to the reflexive construction of self and identity can find a place in formal education. It is naïve, for example, to think that identity work (e.g. fostering scientific thinking, discourse, and dispositions) can be achieved in an environment organized for short bursts of content instruction rather than one that is set up for sustained deep process learning over extended timescales. Following this line of thinking, Veen and Vrakking (2006) suggest that environments to support the development of new literacies need to manifest the following characteristics:

- Students work in time slots of four hours instead of 50 minutes (or less)
- Students work in groups of 90 to 150 but act within basic groups of 12
- Learning is research based, authentic, and has relevance to children
- Content is communicated through interdisciplinary themes
- Network technology plays an important role in the learning process

The features listed above should help educators and researchers to have a better grasp of the tensions that need to be navigated to achieve the vision of New Media & New Literacies education. It should also help them to draw inspiration for how New Media & New Literacies education can inform and enhance traditional goals and modes of teaching and learning with a view toward providing youth with 21st century education.

For guidance on research methodologies for literacy research see Duke and Mallette (2004).

Desirables (3 -5 years)

Given the perturbing and often dislocating nature of research that seeks to reframe educational debate/discourse with a view to reforming/transforming education (and all that that would entail), the appropriate short- to mid-term goals should be prudently modest. It is hoped that relevant stakeholders in education and participants of the education process can be more exposed to new media/new literacies learning goals so that a fruitful dialog can be engendered as research projects in this domain are carried out and experiences and findings shared.

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