Audiences, Intertextuality, and New Media Literacy

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Introduction

The widespread social uses of new media tools and texts imply that audiences have corresponding critical literacy skills that bridge orality, print, visual, moving image, and digital media literacies. In particular, the idea that members of the most recent generation are digital natives adept at understanding and creating new media artifacts is prevalent in the popular press (Prensky 2001), although contested in scholarly circles (Buckingham 2007).

Past forms of visual literacy such as books, images, moving images, and webpages can be loosely characterized as "screens." New media expands the concept of the screen to include pervasive, virtual, simulated, and interactive environments; it also calls into question the nature of audiences as comprising individuals and collective groups over time and space. By all evidence, the culture of schooling seldom touches on the changing nature of screens and audiences to provide reflective, critical approaches to literacy over a wide range of media. This disconnect is due in part to the fact that problems with the integration of new media into the traditional literacy and learning environment have less to do with media access issues and more to do with the ingrained resistance of the culture of schooling to critical thinking, nonhierarchical structures, individual autonomy, customized curriculum, and collective knowledge creation.

The superficial, directed, and efficient approaches to literacy practiced in formal education environments have been a source of frustration for generations of students. However, contemporary audiences' widespread uses of new media present the biggest challenge yet to the dominance of traditional literacy practices in schools.

A recent study for the U.S.-based Pew Charitable Trust's American Life Project reinforces the notion that students are increasingly dissatisfied with their digital experiences at school (Levin and Arafeh 2008). The study surveyed 754 online youth ages 12–17 and their parents. Teens and parents reported that the Internet is vital to completing school projects and has effectively replaced the library for a large number of online youth. Seventy-one percent of students reported using the Internet as their primary source for their last major project. Results also indicate that more than 78 percent of kids 12–17 go online but in focus groups they report that their schools do not make good use of online content. These tech-savvy students see the Internet as an everyday necessity, analogous to a textbook, reference library, tutor, study group, guidance counselor, locker, backpack, or notebook.

A number of studies indicate that parents and students of elementary and secondary age expect unrestricted, high-speed access at all times and cross-platform access to open-source content. They also expect the ability to upload, as well as download, content. They have an affinity for multitasking (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout 2005). And a growing number of students are likely to create their own media products to share with others online (Jenkins et al. 2006; Levin and Arafeh 2008; MTV, Nickelodeon, and Microsoft Digital Advertising Solutions 2007). Access to high-quality digital networks also appears to contribute to increased participatory knowledge creation and creative expression (Jenkins 2006; New Media Consortium and Educause 2006; Oblinger and Oblinger 2005).

For networked, multitasking students, media are unremarkable, organic, ubiquitous, participatory, two-way, normal, and necessary. They serve as social spaces, learning environments, and havens from adult intervention. At the very least, literate students must be able to analyze, access, prioritize, store, tag, retrieve, record, produce, distribute, and remix information in a variety of forms.

Direct Instruction and the Textbook Model

The integration of participatory knowledge creation, new media literacies, and networked resources must compete with a formidable bias toward teacher-centered pedagogies, discipline-based subject matter, group instruction, time schedules, and standardized testing. Given the entrenched culture of alphabetic literacy and direct instruction in schooling, the domi-

nant resource in the classroom—the textbook—reflects models of efficiency that dovetail neatly with the pedagogies and logistics of traditional schooling. In spite of increases in audiences' uses of digital, networked, and moving-image texts both in and outside of school, annual sales figures for conventional educational books are robust. According to the Association of American Publishers, traditional textbooks generated an estimated $6.1 billion in sales to the elementary and secondary school market, representing almost a quarter of the $24.3 billion publishing market in the United States in 2005 (AAP 2008). Seasonal textbook selection and purchase is an academic ritual, deeply ingrained in the culture of schooling. In many ways, textbook publishers are conforming to a conventional customer service model that addresses the existing needs of its client base of teachers and schools.

Textbook publishers are rapidly adding supplementary and networked digital resources to their coursework offerings. Although these hybrid versions of traditional textbooks increase the breadth of information available in classrooms, most still reflect the same content delivery pedagogies found in the printed versions. Classroom resources intended for networked, participatory, collaborative knowledge creation and production are still more often found outside the commercial sector and in informal learning environments.

Traditional print materials have a beneficial place in the contemporary classroom. The question is one of scale, weighing the benefits of textbooks against their limitations for use in customizing content for learning events that involve student knowledge creation across an expanded notion of time and place. When used as a single source of information in a traditional way, their emphasis on facts-based information, reinforced by norm-referenced, standardized assessment measures, creates an obstacle to the kind of participatory, inquiry-based, experiential, and project-based learning environments that are supported by new media.

The Proliferation of Online Archives

The unrestricted use of digital, networked information has great potential to push beyond single-source content resources in order to position students in the role of knowledge creators, as well as information receivers and retrievers. These new classroom resources reinforce knowledge creation in a number of ways by offering a wider variety of alternative information

sources; more information resources; primary source materials; online learning communities; a vast range of experts; new ways to retrieve, organize, and present information in a variety of forms; the ability to use images, moving images, sound, and text; and opportunities to dialogue about texts.

The new resources also demand creativity and digital media skills from educators as they create new learning challenges related to student knowledge of copyright, authorship, surveillance, critique, and access to content intended for adult audiences. The movement of school media from printed forms of literacy to digital forms exacerbates the need to widen the roles, logistics, pedagogies, and resources that are taken for granted in the current school day.

Vast archives of images, audio, moving image, and simulated environments are now available online. These archives expand the concept of public libraries. Teachers can bridge the gap between textbooks and new media by embedding the everyday uses of networked, digital media artifacts in the learning of tasks such as searching, navigation, retrieval, organization, and presentation of information resources. Textbooks thus become one element among many, especially if students are asked to critically analyze and debate the authorship, information selection, and veracity from a diverse array of resources. Even more useful would be to allow students to revise, supplement, and debate textbook content in the form of a wiki.

The proliferation of digital archives is a triumph given the logistics and balance required to both preserve and offer archival material to the public. However, the system still has a few kinks. As addressed in the annual *Horizon Report* about new media and learning:

> This is a difficulty that is growing in scope as more institutions invest in digital archives and collections. Questions of ownership, usage rights, storage, and tagging arise as collections expand. A related aspect, searching and finding, also presents challenges. (New Media Consortium and Educause 2006, p. 4)

In spite of challenges, digital archives are an asset to teaching and learning. The availability of open-source archival material allows for unprecedented opportunities for students and teachers to access, analyze, remix, and use other digital skills to customize instruction across the curriculum. Digital archives also allow students to study and engage with local and regional issues that are too small to include in a large-scale print publication.

Intertextuality: Bridging Old and New Media

The integration of new media into contemporary classrooms involves more than access, logistics, or the economics of school change. In particular, the widespread daily uses of social networking tools, online archives, and other types of digital, networked communications devices call into question the limited range of corresponding pedagogies, tools, and resources used in formal learning environments. For example, the integration of participatory knowledge creation, new media literacies, and networked resources must compete with a formidable institutional bias toward teacher-centered pedagogies, discipline-based subject matter, group instruction, time schedules, and standardized testing. Because of the entrenched culture of alphabetic literacy and direct instruction in schooling, the dominant resource in the classroom—the textbook—reflects models of efficiency that neatly dovetail with the pedagogies and logistics of traditional schooling.

Teacher education programs are only beginning to address new media, and as a result many teachers still use online, networked media resources in the same way that they used textbooks in the past. Structuring classroom tasks around new media resources requires time, interest, and creativity from both students and teachers. One goal of participatory knowledge creation is to rely on group contributions to learning. In this way, teachers and students can work together to inform the learning process. Although students may have skills in tool use and digital conventions, teachers have the curriculum design skills and the broader contexts that can make isolated bits of content come alive.

Teachers know that designing classroom tasks demands the ability to "break down" or "scaffold" the path to learning and then to put it all back together so that students can find a "gestalt" or "big picture" that puts the learning event into a broader context. The media-studies concept of *intertextuality* might serve as a way to bridge old and new media in the learning environment.

Intertextuality is a term used by poststructuralist scholars to imply the overlapping of the codes and conventions in texts and the way that audiences use these codes and conventions to create meaning (Allen 2000; Kristeva 1980, 1986). Because genre, aesthetics, and narratives constantly shift, overlap, and evolve, meaning-making is an ongoing phenomenon that accelerates as audiences become accustomed to new media form and content. Audience interpretation of diverse media texts goes far

beyond their understanding of intertextual narratives or messages. As audiences make sense of texts, they draw from their previous knowledge of genre, aesthetic look and feel, and issues related to presentation and context. The central implication of intertextuality is that no text is original or unique but instead draws upon other texts for its structure and meaning.

As new media use codes and conventions in divergent ways, producers also draw from familiar forms as they upgrade to new technologies. For example, both movies and television used the conventions of live theater in their early histories. The invention of tools like cranes and zoom lenses enabled directors to use camera movement to shape the montage beyond simple action framed on a stage-like screen. Many web screens in the early 1990s were designed as books, right down to the concept of web "pages" and graphics that look like spiral binding. As audience understanding of the Web evolves, the interactivity, usability, hyperlinks, and multiple media of the web look less like a book and more like a virtual transit area or architectural space.

Although audiences do like surprises and creative twists as they encounter new texts, introducing codes and conventions to new audiences abruptly and outside the audiences' frame of reference can cause confusion, derision, and resentment. One example from the history of cinema is the opening sequence of Oliver Stone's 1991 *JFK* about events related to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Although the movie's premise of conspiracy was provocative, most of the movie was composed and edited in the conventional Hollywood narrative form. However, the opening sequence used the conventions of an avant-garde montage of found images from the Cold War era.

The opening credit sequence of *JFK* presents black-and-white news footage cut with clips from educational and government films and frames from the well-known 8mm footage shot by Abraham Zapruder, all of which are sequenced with new footage shot by the director. A voice-over tells a conspiratorial story of Cold War events that foreshadows the point of view and premise of the film. Stone used codes and conventions such as archival footage and authoritative voiceover that signal a documentary to the audience. After the opening credit sequence, the movie switches to the more conventional forms of the narrative feature.

Although the film's original audiences were familiar with both the documentary form and the historical fiction form, audiences and critics reacted with outrage and accused the director of displaying deceptive information. One theory is that because few in the audience were familiar with nonnarrative, experimental work, they felt confused, disoriented, and patronized. Another theory is that with the exception of some documentaries such as *The Atomic Cafe*, circa 1982, audiences still expected documentary images to illustrate the pictures and voiceover in a "factual" way through the use of primary and secondary source materials. Whatever the explanation for the reaction, Stone pushed the envelope by combining the codes and conventions of fictional and nonfictional narratives. Press accounts reported that audience reactions to the already controversial tone of the movie ranged from distasteful to outrageous to explosive. Perhaps disingenuously, Stone repeatedly explained that his movie was a fictional, historical narrative that used artistic codes and conventions found in the arts. Stone did heavily borrow from a century-long history of avant-garde montage. However, his opening sequence in *JFK* was, if not ahead of its time, at least ahead if its audience. With the widespread distribution of remix codes and conventions in contemporary movies, television, and on YouTube, a larger segment of contemporary audiences might be more likely to at least appreciate the intertextual expertise of the *JFK* credit sequence. But in its time, the remix montage of *JFK* was unfamiliar to those outside the fine arts and avant-garde cinema audience. As a result, readings of the film were based on literal deconstruction of the text.

Student understanding of codes and conventions that transcend media forms is key as educators transition from the design of alphabetic literacy to new media learning environments. In a scaffolded approach, when the intertextual codes and conventions of multiliteracies are explicitly detailed for students through deconstruction and critical analysis, they provide metaphors so that students can strategically use their full range of literacies to demonstrate learning. In the spirit of Web 2.0, a net-savvy generation of users can—and does—use this knowledge as they switch between their roles as audience members, producers, and distributors.

As teachers model the uses of archival material, they support students to become media archaeologists with the ability to locate, retrieve, evaluate, and use found media materials from a wide range of sources and media forms. At minimum, the competencies needed to work with archival materials can be narrowed into four broad and overlapping strategies for

analysis and production: sourcing, linking, recontextualizing, and repurposing.

Using Media Texts to Model the Discovery Process in Knowledge Creation

In order to integrate new media into the learning environment, teachers must be willing to select significant texts, present them to students, and then monitor and guide their progress as they critically analyze their meaning and significance. This approach nudges students from simple access and compilation of amusing material; it encourages them to explore the deeper meaning of each new text within its social, economic, political, cultural, and historical contexts.

If audiences are to understand the value and resonance of information resources over time, they must understand not only the codes and conventions that enable them to make sense of a medium but also the way in which earlier audiences took in the contextual elements that helped them to make sense of the medium at the time it was produced and distributed. Preservation without audience access to or appreciation of the artifact is a hollow task.

The endgame is to simulate conditions that put contemporary viewers in the seats of audiences from the time that a medium was originally produced. In the presentation of a film program at the 2007 San Francisco Silent Film Festival called *Retour de flamme* (*Saved from the Flame*), noted French archivist Serge Bromberg remarked that the relationship between archival material and audiences is situated, complex, and profound. "[Archivists] are not only in the business of preserving film. We are also in the business of preserving audiences" (Bromberg 2007).

In order to convey the significance of contextual elements to audience reception and meaning creation over time, the learning environment must be structured enough to lead students to new insights and flexible enough to allow for the process of critique and discovery. Pedagogical design for contextual understanding involves the use of evidence but also the freedom to speculate about the possible relationships between content and contexts. Four sequential techniques can help to facilitate the use of archival materials from content retrieval to contextual understanding.

Sourcing

Contemporary students must know how to search, retrieve, store, manipulate, and cite a wide array of information resources. More classroom tasks are needed to model the access and use of primary and secondary source documents, fragments, quotes, pictures, sound, moving images, works of art, interviews, audio, and so on. In some ways, the skill set for sourcing aligns with traditional library practices. However, there is also a critical literacy component as students demonstrate their ability to strategically retrieve and present supporting information from a broader spectrum of resources. As students engage in dialogues about the contexts of meaning, they also have the opportunity to hone their rhetorical and argumentation skills while building a deeper understanding of the text. Ideally, the process used to manipulate source texts will contribute to hands-on, experiential knowledge creation and critical thinking by students.

Linking

Linking refers to the process of finding relationships among diverse media artifacts in order to map the terrain of a social phenomenon or event. Exercises of this type connect archival information from historical, economic, political, social, and cultural domains and are an example of the way that contextual elements can be isolated and connected to deepen the meaning of content in a kind of textual gestalt. The process of discovery begins with awareness of peripheral and related topics presented in manageable lessons until the pieces fall into place and the learner arrives at a deeper and wider understanding of a text through the sum of its parts. As teachers plan the learning environment, they can strategically model the process by retrieving and presenting contextual clues that relate to the primary text or phenomenon. Online materials are especially useful for flexible, just-in-time retrieval that can be used to customize the learning environment. As students experience insight into the deeper meaning and social relevance of literacy texts, they can demonstrate their learning through a widening web of contextual information.

The idea is to stimulate students' ability to see patterns and to discern possible connections by analyzing texts with comparable form, content, or contexts. By searching for clues to meaning outside the text and connecting each link to new supporting evidence, students begin to hone their ability to search, retrieve, organize, and use related materials to create a semantic web of evidence and understanding.

Recontextualizing

Techniques for deconstructing media narratives and aesthetics are most useful when informed by issues of context as well as content. Audiences draw from contexts to provide a frame of reference as they create meaning with a text. Over time, artifacts lose some of the contextual details that resonated with their original audiences. Presenting and recreating some original contextual elements in order to create historically informed interpretations of content can be useful and can be done through role-play, mock interviews, or viewing cross-genre media from the same time period. For example, students might find when interpreting a narrative feature film that reading reviews of the film and viewing a related documentary from the same time period are useful. Or virtual environments can be used to simulate contextual elements for student immersion. In the case of *JFK*, students might be enlightened by looking at press accounts about the Cuban missile crisis, the Kennedy assassination, and conspiracy theorists. Viewing the original amateur footage of the assassination shot by Abraham Zapruder could likewise be enlightening. The idea is to model for students ways to speculate about how audiences in the 1960s may have viewed the 8mm footage from Zapruder and then to compare their responses to modern audiences' responses to the same digitized text. The more that students are aware of the original conditions of viewing, the deeper their understanding of both archival and contemporary media.

Repurposing

Repurposing resonates with mashup or remix cultures and simply means the use of archival media in a way that differs from its original purpose. This involves altering, inserting, deleting, editing, combining, sampling, or changing the sequence of an original text, image, found footage, montage, or audio recording to produce a customized production that is different from the original. This technique came into its own in the remix culture of hip-hop and rap recordings but also has a long history in the fine arts—for example, readymades, collage, and montage construction. Repurposing in new media production is often done in an ironic or satirical way that is especially useful as a subversive commentary on social, cultural, and political values. Recombining and sampling legacy data, multimedia, images, clips, sound bites, and

other forms of found media forces audiences to look anew at the original text and reveals the underlying codes, conventions, and ideologies that inform both the original meaning and its new iteration. Popular amateur distribution outlets such as YouTube offer audiences an orientation into this technique and have stimulated its innovation and refinement for broad audiences.

As schools transition into new media learning environments, media studies techniques of this type offer a modest orientation into the possibilities for engaging and creative instruction across media. Historically, scholars looked to reading, writing, listening, and speaking as forms of literacy. In contemporary schooling circles, educators now debate the need to add "viewing," "representing," and "immersion in virtual worlds" to the growing list of literacy competencies (National Study Group 2005). Because of competing ideologies about what it means to be "learned" or "literate," defining various definitions of literacy and, in particular, the skills and knowledge associated with literacy has long been a matter of contentious debate (Goody 1977; Scribner and Cole 1981; Graff 1987). In the meantime, schools are left to confront significant challenges—but also increased supports—as they rethink the value of new media literacy to the classroom. The integration of new media tools for knowledge creation, a broader array of online classroom information resources, and collaborative pedagogies are steps that can be taken now to leverage the existing literacy skills of contemporary students and direct them to a lifetime of discovery.

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