Teaching & Learning Faculty Publications

Teaching & Learning

The Role of Mobile Learning in Promoting Literacy and Human Rights for Women and Girls

Judith Dunkerly-Bean
Old Dominion University, jdunkerl@odu.edu

Helen Crompton
Old Dominion University, crompton@odu.edu

Original Publication Citation

Chapter 99

The Role of Mobile Learning in Promoting Literacy and Human Rights for Women and Girls

Judith M. Dunkerly-Bean
Old Dominion University, USA

Helen Crompton
Old Dominion University, USA

ABSTRACT

In this chapter the authors review the fairly recent advances in combating illiteracy around the globe through the use of e-readers and mobile phones most recently in the Worldreader program and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) mobile phone reading initiatives. Situated in human rights and utilizing the lens of transnational feminist discourse which addresses globalization and the hegemonic, monolithic portrayals of "third world" women as passive and in need of the global North's intervention, the authors explore the ways in which the use of digital media provides increased access to books, and other texts and applications in both English and native languages for people in developing countries. However, while advances in combating illiteracy through the use of e-readers, mobile phones and other mobile learning initiatives are promising, the tensions and power imbalances of digital literacies, which resources are available by whom, for whom and why, must also be examined.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a human right, a tool of personal empowerment through expression as well as a means to social, cultural and human development. Yet the nature and use of literacy, for whom, under which circumstances and for what purposes is a contentious question that depends greatly on the social views, cultural capital, politics, and temporality of both its teachers, students and the communities of discourse in which they participate (Foucault, 1972;Gee, 1996)). In short, who is considered literate and what

literac(ies) are considered to be worth knowing are dependent on dominant societal, and in an age of globalization, transnational constructs.. Carl Kaestle (1991) points to the inherently social and political aspects of literacy in stating,

Literacy is discriminatory with regard to both access and content. Problems of discrimination are not resolved just because access is achieved; there is a cultural price tag to literacy. Thus, whether literacy is liberating or constraining depends in part whether it is used as an instrument of conformity or creativity. (p. 30)

That is to say that the mere access to literacy does not guarantee that access to the liberatory potential of literacy is achieved as well. Rather, access is a necessary but not sufficient condition for liberation.

In discussing the plurality of literacy and the nature of being literate, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) posits, "the way literacy is defined influences the goals and strategies adopted and the programs designed by policy makers as well as the teaching and learning methodologies curricula, and materials employed by practitioners. Its definition also determines how progress or achievements in overcoming illiteracy will be monitored or assessed" (UNESCO, 2004, p. 12). According to recent international data compiled by UNESCO, there are currently 773.5 million adults globally who are functionally illiterate. Of that number, 63.8% are women. 123.2 million children are illiterate, 61/3% of them are girls. The lowest literacy rates worldwide are found in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South and West Asia (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2013). The significance of these numbers to the struggle for the recognition of human rights for women cannot be ignored (Kelleher, 2014). Addressing global illiteracy, especially for women and girls is a necessary, but not sufficient component in recognizing the human rights, especially in regard to the education of all.

In this chapter we review the advances in combating illiteracy around the globe through the use of mobile learning initiatives such as e-readers and mobile phones, most recently in the *Worldreader* program as well as in UNESCO's mobile reading initiatives (West & Chew, 2014). We utilize the lens of transnational feminist discourse (Hesford & Kozol, 2005; Swarr & Nagar, 2010) that addresses the effects of globalization and the hegemonic and monolithic portrayals of "third world" women as passive and in need of the global North's intervention. Additionally, while advances in combating illiteracy through the use of e-readers and other mobile devices are promising, the tensions and power imbalances of digital literacies, especially in developing countries must also be examined. Intrinsic to this examination is the recognition of the multifaceted interconnections between global flows, particularly of information and ideas, when digital media "travel" from one locale to another, far removed not only in place but in resources and power as well.

BACKGROUND

Thus, to begin, we situate this review in the affordances and limitations of human rights discourse, especially as it relates to women and girls. Building upon the themes and tensions particular to the human rights discourse, we discuss the ways in which transnational feminisms speak to the effect of globalization and the contexts of both the local and the global, as well as the public and private sphere. Having established the lens in which we situate digital media in this review of the literature, we explore mobile

28 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the product's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-role-of-mobile-learning-in-promoting-literacy-and-human-rights-for-women-and-girls/163620?camid=4v1

This title is available in InfoSci-Books, InfoSci-Educational Science and Technology, Library Science, Information Studies, and Education, InfoSci-Select. Recommend this product to your librarian:
www.igi-global.com/e-resources/library-recommendation/?id=1

Related Content

A Critical Perspective on the Challenges for Blended Learning and Teaching in Africa's Higher Education
Alfred T. Kisubi (2013). *Transcultural Blended Learning and Teaching in Postsecondary Education (pp. 145-168).*
www.igi-global.com/chapter/critical-perspective-challenges-blended-learning/68623?camid=4v1a

Blending Face-to-Face and Technology: Implementing Flipped K-12 Classrooms
Philip G. Pulley (2014). *Practical Applications and Experiences in K-20 Blended Learning Environments (pp. 105-119).*
www.igi-global.com/chapter/blending-face-to-face-and-technology/92969?camid=4v1a

Mobile Phones as Mediating Tools within Augmented Contexts for Development
John Cook (2010). *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning (pp. 1-12).*
www.igi-global.com/article/mobile-phones-mediating-tools-within/46116?camid=4v1a

Empirical Research into Students' Mobile Phones and their Use for Learning
Claire Bradley and Debbie Holley (2011). *International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning (pp. 38-53).*
www.igi-global.com/article/empirical-research-into-students-mobile/60138?camid=4v1a