

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

CONTRIBUTING, CREATING, CURATING: DIGITAL LITERACIES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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APA Citation: Godwin-Jones, R. (2015). Contributing, Creating, Curating: Digital Literacies for Language Learners. *Language Learning & Technology* 19(3), 8–20. Retrieved from <http://llt.msu.edu/issues/october2015/emerging.pdf>

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INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized, connected world, fixed and stable identities are increasingly uncommon. The means and modes of online communication and engagement, themselves powerful contributors to identity formation, are likewise in a constant state of flux. Participating in emerging online communities may require users to develop new skills, acquire specific software or hardware, and/or learn particular conventions and behavior norms. In this column we will be looking at what that dynamic entails and what impact the ongoing need for new literacies and competencies has on language learning, both in formal instruction and in out-of-school environments. We will be looking at ways in which learners achieve language and literacy gains through participation in online communal spaces and how such activities relate to formal language instruction. Engaging with Internet-based communities is likely to involve the ability to interact with and to create or remix materials and resources in a variety of media and from a variety of sources. In addition to focused or incidental language learning through roles played in participatory Internet communities we will also look at the need for language learners to develop competence in searching out, evaluating, and collecting online materials, tools, and services. This includes the guiding role language teachers can play in the process. As language teachers, our ultimate goal is to enable and encourage our students to gain the knowledge, skills, and motivation to become autonomous language learners and culturally responsible participants in local and online communities. Capability in a full range of digital literacies is key to that process and vital today in education, personal life, and work environments:

The growing importance of online technologies for the ways in which we work and learn in global networks has meant that today, instead of using technology simply to learn FLs, learners need to learn how to combine both FL skills and "e-skills" or "new literacies" to be able to work and collaborate in new contexts where the borders between the visual and the real and between the distant and the proximate are increasingly blurred (Dooly & O'Dowd, 2012, p. 15).

That blurring of boundaries among literacies, genres, and modes of representation is what makes this topic intriguing and challenging.

PARTICIPATING IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Language learners have access today to a wealth of authentic materials online, an invaluable resource for language learning. Even more valuable is the access to authentic people online—that is, the ability to connect to and communicate with others who speak or are learning the target language. Numerous articles in recent years have provided examples of students' language and culture gains through engaging in online activities such as discussion forums (Schuetze, 2008), synchronous chat (Hauck & Youngs, 2008), blogging (Jimenez-Caicedo, Lozano, & Gomez, 2014), and skyping (Mullen, Appel, & Shanklin, 2009).

Many of the activities referenced in these articles occur in a formal instructional setting, often in the context of class-to-class exchanges. There have been a good number of studies that explore the affordances and challenges of organized telecollaboration for both language learning and intercultural communication competence (Belz & Thorne, 2006; Lamy & Hampel, 2007; O'Dowd (2007); Guth & Helm, 2010; Dooly & O'Dowd, 2012).

Increasingly, language learners are independently seeking out opportunities for contact with others online. They are also taking advantage on their own of the variety of texts and media available in multiple languages. The opportunities for language learning through Internet resources are a major reason for the recent upsurge in the interest in learner autonomy in language learning (see Luzón, Ruiz-Madrid, & Villanueva, 2010; Benson, 2013; Benson & Voller, 2014; Murray, 2014). A recent collection of essays on *Language Learning Beyond the Classroom* (Nunan & Richards, 2015) provides examples of learners using a wide variety of tools and services for language learning: extensive reading with MoodleReader; listening logs with Voice of America or TED talks; BBC's mywordbook for vocabulary learning; popular songs and lyrics for listening comprehension; using massively multiplayer online role-playing games for vocabulary practice; Facebook utilized in a variety of ways; and using varied resources, such as the language learning service Duolingo, language exchange websites, tandem learning, online TV, the VoiceThread collaborative tool, YouTube video creation, and many others.

Case studies have illustrated non-traditional, mashup style involvement in online spaces, including creating websites dedicated to popular genres of writing such as *manga* (Lam, 2000) or writing fanfiction (extending popular movie or book storylines) in the L2 (Black, 2006). In recent years, there has also been a good number of studies pointing to language gains through participation in online gaming communities (Godwin-Jones, 2014b). These activities are chosen by the students themselves, and are not done as school assignments. This leads to a degree of personal engagement unlikely for school-related activities. In most cases, the individual motivation leads participants to acquire, on their own, the skills and knowledge to be able to participate in the online communities. For those using an L2 in these contexts, such experiences provide a very real, task-based need for just-in-time language input that may range from vocabulary queries to issues of language pragmatics (such as asking for or volunteering to give help). The real world need makes uptake more likely. These online activities represent real language use, not the simulated reality and practice environment of the classroom.

The global reach of the internet means that these experiences typically occur in multilingual and multicultural contexts, leading to opportunities for both linguistic and cultural learning. In formal instructional settings, the extent to which teachers value the skills and knowledge gained can vary tremendously, depending on the student, teacher, and instructional context. In some cases, L2 teachers may see literacy practices such as writing fanfiction as irrelevant, or even as a waste of time. That is even more likely if the out-of-school experience is connected to online gaming (Thorne, 2010). One of the factors that may lead to an ambiguous or negative teacher view is the different kind of language likely to be used in informal online spaces, which make heavy use of code switching, hybridized forms, slang, specialized vocabulary, and formulaic speech. One would hope that teachers would recognize the value of adding this kind of alternative language register to the students' repertoire, but that is likely to depend on the individual teacher as well as on the educational, social, and political environment. In settings where high-stakes testing or other factors impose a tightly controlled focus on standardized language and a specified syllabus of vocabulary and grammar, there's like to be less interest in encouraging students to pursue informal online language learning opportunities.

In some studies, student performance in instructed language learning was seen to have improved through independent participation in online communities (Black, 2006). In other cases, students have felt alienated in language classes (Lam, 2000). In either situation, these extracurricular activities can contribute substantially to young people's identity positions—ones that in some cases they may feel are of greater importance than their roles as school or university students. One of the dynamics at work in participating

in online communities is the possibility of trying out different roles and identities. Students can perform them through a new language, without the risk of the embarrassment that might be entailed in face-to-face situations or in the classroom. L2 students participating in online collaborative spaces have the opportunity of experiencing different language registers and learning about formal and informal rules and conventions for participation. In some cases, cultural appropriateness of speech may be more important than linguistic accuracy. In a study by Hanna and de Nooy (2009), students learning French participated in a public discussion forum for the French daily *Le Monde* and found that social skills and adherence to the forum guidelines were considerably more important than the accuracy of their French. This is the kind of hard-won, real-world knowledge students are less likely to gain from in-class language learning. The experience provides as well a degree of personal agency that is an uncommon byproduct of classroom instruction.

Curricular integration

One of the difficulties for many teachers who encourage students' out-of-class online activities is curricular integration. As the L2 usage in these contexts is unforeseeable and unstructured, the type of language learning taking place is difficult to align with pre-programmed grammar, vocabulary, or other specific learning content. It may be helpful to think of the language learning experience represented by globalized online spaces in a similar vein as how study abroad has been viewed. No one expects the experience studying abroad to duplicate learning on campus. Instead, we anticipate that study abroad will complement in-class instruction, by providing opportunities for improving fluency and deepening culture learning. As is the case for study abroad, the approach to integrating and assessing language gains from participation in collaborative online activities may best be programmatic, rather than viewed from the course level. Learning can be documented through learner journals or portfolios in the context of fulfilling a language requirement or as part of the curriculum for a major concentration. The use of "bridging activities" (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008) supplies a strategy for incorporating out-of-class online participation into a course, as well as to provide a means for students themselves to take a leading role in finding and evaluating resources of interest.

A likely stated goal of many language programs today is "digital literacy". Here, too, evidence of knowledge may best be assessed through student submissions documenting representative activities, rather than through checklists, formal assessments, or required short courses. One of the impediments to having students demonstrate the ability to use a variety of online tools and services is the widespread use of learning management systems (LMS). The arguments in favor of using such systems, namely the convenience for teachers as well as the utility of the built-in management tools (Orsini-Jones, 2010) are easily trumped by the restrictive and proprietary environment:

[LMS] uniformity and predictability, however, has its disadvantages. The spoon-fed content delivery and closed environment of the LMS is far removed from the vibrant, ever-changing online world in which our students are fully engaged. Many of today's students are likely heavy users of social networking sites, multi-player gaming, and media mashups. The static and controlled environment of an LMS is unlikely to either attract or stimulate such students. For those students less experienced in online activities, an LMS contributes little to the kind of technology literacy they will need for their personal and work lives. (Godwin-Jones, 2012, p. 6)

Building a course around a website set up in *Blackboard Learn*, or another such proprietary system contextualizes online activities as course assignments and discourages students from seeing possible sources for language learning outside that system, such as through common—and likely familiar—tools and services like Twitter, Facebook, or Flickr. If we are helping students become lifelong learners, integrating language learning into everyday online practices is essential. As Guy Merchant comments, use of an LMS may restrict teachers' likelihood to experiment in using online services: "The creative

imaginings of innovative teachers could well be locked down, and the potential to develop the new kinds of learning and literacy that are associated with Web 2.0 participation may be limited" (Merchant, 2009, pp. 109-110). Another issue in the exclusive use of an LMS is the fact that such closed systems preclude student work from becoming part of the shareable web. Studies have shown that having student products publicly visible makes a great deal of difference in the commitment of students to do their best work (Oskoz & Elola, 2014).

One of the quandaries for language teachers who wish to move beyond use of an LMS, is the likelihood that there will be institutional support for LMS use, but not for other software or online services. Training, if offered, may not keep up-to-date with emerging tools and software. There's also the reality that adding a course component such as class-to-class telecollaboration takes considerable time and effort—and may come with scant professional rewards. The teacher will need to seek out a possible partner (maybe using a service such as [Mixxer](#) or [MyLanguageExchange](#)) who seems likely to be reliable, make contact, and have extensive conversations to work out the exchange logistics. If local help is available, it is likely to be of a technical nature, and not address the practical and pedagogical information teachers need most. One of the alternatives is to point students towards use of a third-party service such as [italki](#). A successful model, run independently of schools and universities, is [Soliya](#), which offers a well-organized structure incorporating group intermediaries.

Creating and sharing across modes and genres

Much of the activity in globalized online spaces is within genres that are exclusively or primarily text-based. That includes blog posts, media reviews, chat, commentaries, status updates, or other forms of online written communication. The different modes and purposes in online reading carry with them different kinds of reading skills and processes, such as reading for gist, scroll reading, page display adjusting, or hypertext literacy. For L2 reading, one could add, using dual language dictionaries, assessing text readability, using a service such as the [Readability Test Tool](#), or incorporating on-the-fly glossing, with tools such as [Readlang](#) or [Globefish instant translator](#). Increasingly, online communication enhances text through incorporation of visual or aural media. It has become commonplace in text messaging to include photos, audio snippets, or short video clips, largely driven by the capabilities of mobile phones to take high-quality photos and capture video. This has led to the popularity of apps like [Snapchat](#) or [Vine](#) which enable ephemeral, personalized sharing of media. This trend has resulted in increased user familiarity with image manipulation and video editing. The wide use of visual media and sound creates multimodal representations, which have become the norm for webpages today.

The major photo and video sharing services are global in scope, and this offers opportunities for language and cultural exchange and learning. Benson and Chik (2010) discuss the example of a "mini English lesson", provided by an exchange on the photo sharing site [Flickr](#). As described in an article by Davies (2007), a Norwegian woman asked about the meaning of an English word used in describing a photograph. Benson and Chik (2010) comment:

In a relatively simple way, this interaction illustrates three apparently characteristic features of translingual interaction in online spaces. First, it involves adaptation of a familiar kind of interaction to an essentially unfamiliar textual context: a FL learning question, here, appears in a space "intended for" comments on a photograph. Second, the interaction takes place around a "third" object, in this case, a photograph, through which it becomes situated. Lastly, it is essentially a casual, friendly and mutually supportive interaction: one that does not apparently involve a great deal of commitment on either side, but nevertheless generates positive feelings for both participants (p. 73).

This example points to the way in which online collaborative spaces can lead to interactions which foster

sharing and learning as "situated FL literacy practices" (p. 73). These practices are creating new ad hoc text-types and multimodal genres that can incorporate language learning in different ways; examples are fanfiction writing, fansubbing (unofficial subtitling by users), game modding (modifying a computer game), and machinima animations (creating animated films based on games).

Student activities of this kind are most likely to come from their own initiative in exploring and experimenting. In the process, students are likely to become familiar with the use of tools for editing images, sound, and video. They may be using the basic editing tools now available on smartphones. Alternatively, they may be using a variety of free or inexpensive tools available online or on desktop computers, such as [Gimp](#) or [PhotoScape](#) for images, [Audacity](#) for sound editing, or video editors such as [VideoPad](#), [Windows Movie Maker](#), or [iMovie](#). Cloud-based services like [WeVideo](#), [pics.io](#), or [SoundCloud](#) have gained prominence in recent years. The [popularity of Chromebooks](#) in education has led to a great deal of interest in such server-based tools, as those devices do not support local software or include file storage.

The Modern Language Association (MLA) has recently released a preview of a curated set of resources for [Digital Pedagogies in the Humanities](#). The curated sites offer examples from a variety of humanities disciplines illustrating the integration of digital tools and services into teaching. They provide concrete examples of using tools for creating multimodal online materials and projects, which combine different kinds of media. Many involve taking existing resources, such as literary texts or historical documents, and adding resources for explication or expansion. A number of recent tools and services make creation of such mashups much easier. [Popcorn Maker](#) offers a drag and drop interface for remixing web video, audio, and images, to create a popup-style video with the option of embedding text annotations. It is part of Mozilla's [WebMaker](#) project, which offers a variety of services for creating rich media content. With the [Korakov System](#), users can create dynamic, browser-based documentaries that interact with non-linear (user choosable) narratives (in the form of short video clips). [TourBuilder](#) enables creation of virtual tours based on [Google Earth](#), which combine photos, text, and video. [Aurasma](#) is a service for using existing photos or objects to create augmented reality "auras" which can be triggered when a viewer points a phone camera at a real-world image. "[Explorable explanations](#)" combines media with alternative text views to create highly interactive and media-rich webpages. A JavaScript library, [Tangle](#), enables adding this functionality to webpages. Working with such tools creates in students an awareness of the ways in which content can be modified and manipulated. It imparts the message that software does not offer a transparent way of representing reality or making meaning of events, people, or objects. The reality that the choice of media or tool is not neutral has been widely discussed in the context of telecollaborative tools (Thorne, 2003) and is all the more relevant for mashups and augmented reality, which explicitly seek to modify existing materials.

Some media create the illusion of transparency, giving the impression that reality is being presented without any mediation or filtering—for example, webcams in videoconferencing, particularly in one-on-one exchanges. Kern (2014) shares specific examples of how far this is from being the case. The use of webcams leads videoconferencers to compensate for the camera's limited visual field by heightening their facial expressiveness as they speak. Real eye contact between the interlocutors is not possible—users look at the screen, not at the camera. Gestures used when speaking are often not seen, as they are outside the camera angle. In sum, the experience is very different from face-to-face conversations. Kern suggests having students view recordings of videoconferencing, so as to be aware of the visual dynamics. He concludes that, "videoconferencing, like any other technologically mediated form of communication, is not an innate ability or natural act, but is a skill that develops over time" (p. 347).

Although multimodal texts and digital storytelling have been widely used in L1 contexts, they offer opportunities for language learners that are just as compelling. Hafner and Miller (2011) discuss the benefits of using digital stories in an English for science course. Students created multimodal scientific documentaries in English, working in teams to build their projects, which were shared publicly online.

The project represents a blending of genres, combining linguistic and rhetorical features typical of formal scientific presentations with those more typical of popular science. Another blending of genres is represented by projects using the [ARIS](#) platform to create mobile games featuring augmented reality. *Chrono-Ops*, a game with an ecological theme, was created at Portland State University. As part of the game process, users write texts, record audio, and shoot video, all of which can become assets for future players.

Creating games with ARIS simplifies the authoring process compared to creating such projects from scratch. In fact, template-based or simplified drag-and-drop interfaces for producing multimodal materials are on the increase. The [ProgrammableWeb](#) collects and curates emerging APIs (application programming interface) and mashup options. At the same time, there has recently been a good deal of interest in encouraging students to learn computer programming. A number of initiatives, such as the [Scratch](#) project from MIT, have been created to encourage young people to learn to code. This degree of hands-on digital literacy is a benefit to teachers as well (Godwin-Jones, 2015).

Core information literacies: Searching and curating

If learning to code, or even understanding a basic scripting language such as HTML, is fundamental to understanding how information technology works, learning effective internet searching is fundamental to using online resources. It's likely that students researching topics will use Google exclusively to locate resources. It's also likely that the majority of them will never use the advanced search options for fine-tuning. As shown in a recent study (Mutta, Pelttari, Salmi, Chevalier, & Johansson, 2014), these and other basic kinds of information literacy may take a backseat to quickly finding resources that seem to fit a need. In the process, more appropriate resources go untapped, and research results may suffer from superficiality and single source consulting (most likely from [Wikipedia](#)). Students are also likely to be unaware of the "filter bubble" endemic to the web today, which guides search results based on user profiles. The algorithms used by Google and others tend to send users to resources related to previous searches, products purchased, geographical location, and personal information gleaned, such as age, profession, or marital status. As Kern (2014) comments, this leads to a distorted view of ourselves and others:

The result is that the World Wide Web may be becoming less and less of a window onto the world and more and more of a window onto ourselves. With each exploratory click we make on a Web site, we may be influencing what our future clicks will produce, and the more we use the Internet, the more narrow and personalized our Internet can ultimately become. In the end, the risk that is that we are led to believe that the foreign is really not so foreign, but very much like ourselves, since that's what the Internet returns to us (p. 352).

This provides a challenge for teachers and students to explore and discuss ways to break out of this experience of navel-gazing. Given the central importance of information literacy in social and professional life today, language instructors might consider including hands-on demonstrations and discussions of finding and using core tools and services. That includes tips on becoming an informed Google searcher as well as on using a social network search tool such as [Topsy](#). The study by Mutta et al. (2014) recounts that learner training in search techniques resulted in fewer uses of Wikipedia as the sole source of information. Another useful area to discuss is the use of a service such as [Diigo](#) to collect bookmarks and discover curated resources. One of the popular tools for collecting and sharing linked information is [Pinterest](#). With its emphasis on visualizations, Pinterest would be a useful tool for having students create a collage of their imagined future selves—finding images, videos, and texts that anticipate their life incorporating the L2 and target culture. The collages could be then shared through the "social boards" Pinterest makes available. Of considerable importance in a language class is a discussion of online language tools such as dual language dictionaries, online thesauri, and spell/grammar checkers.

Here too, students tend to take the path of least resistance, choosing the first listed online dictionary. Demonstrating look-up with a tool such as [linguee](#) demonstrates the utility of language corpora, their potential use, and the help they can provide in working with collocations. Chun (2011) has shown that there is a disconnect between what language learners choose to use for assistance and what research shows actually works the most effectively. In-class or online discussions about student experiences using various tools and services can be a valuable learning experience.

Another area that can benefit students through in-class or online demonstrations and discussions is the use of machine translation. Students are likely familiar with [Google Translate](#), but may not have a sense of what it does well (short phrases) and where it's likely to be less reliable (idiomatic speech). Its accuracy also depends on the specific language pair, as the dual language corpora it relies on can vary in size and, thus, in reliability. Providing this kind of training to students is no different, or any less valuable, than the habit many language teachers already have, of instructing students in the efficient use of print dictionaries (i.e. which to use, how to understand symbols, the utility of back translating, etc.). One possibility is to show students a sample sentence translated using different machine translations. [Figure 1](#) shows German versions of an English sentence, "I am going to the store today to buy my father a tie" (generated by the [imTranslate comparison tool](#)), with none of the suggested versions being acceptable, as all have multiple grammar and/or vocabulary errors. All the translations keep the syntax of the original English sentence, rather than, as is often the case in German, beginning the sentence with the time expression.





Translation by Google™	Translation by PROMT-Online	Translation by Babylon®	Translation by Microsoft®
 Ich bin in den Laden gehen heute zu kaufen mein Vater eine Krawatte.	 ich bin zum Lager heute dabei, meinen Vati eine Krawatte zu kaufen.	 ich werde zum Speicher heute meinen Vati kaufen eine Bindung.	 Ich werde das Geschäft heute zu meinem Vater eine Krawatte kaufen.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Back translation I'm going to the store today to buy my father a tie.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Back translation today I am about to the camp to buy my daddy a tie.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Back translation I am going to the store today my Dad would buy a bond.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Back translation I'll buy a tie business today to my father.

Figure 1. Sample machine translations from English into German

Discussing how machine translations work, i.e. rule-based systems versus those that rely primarily on pre-translated parallel texts, gives students insights into how languages differ. For many monolingual US students, language difference is perceived as largely semantic. A basic discussion of translating difficulties can illuminate the nature of language per se as well as pointing to specific contrasts between the students' L1 and the target L2.

The need for learner training

In many areas of technology use, students are likely to have gained proficiency on their own, such as in the use of social networking sites or the use of online media. However, when it comes to areas such as multimodal production or effective application of online services to language learning, Hubbard (2004) makes the case that students are likely to need guidance (see also Williams, Abraham, & Bostelmann, 2014; Peters & Frankoff, 2014). Kurek and Hauck (2014) advocate the use of a three-tiered framework for training students to enable them to "move along a continuum from informed reception of technology-mediated input through thoughtful participation in opinion-generating activities and up to creative contribution of multimodal output" (p. 120). The process parallels that of language development from observation through imitation to full participation. Along the way, they cite the need for instructional scaffolding so that students be able to adapt skills to an educational environment:

Many young learners have embraced what has been termed online “participatory cultures” (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006) and know how to build their online presence through social networking sites, avatars, audio/video casts, mash-ups, and/or by taking part in online gaming. Yet, harnessing the full potential of digital offerings requires strategic action guided by a personally unique blend of competences on a technical, cognitive, social, communicative, and even personality level. Therefore, it seems highly unlikely that multiliteracy skills for more formal educational purposes such as language acquisition can be obtained by learners through informal and uninformed technology practices (p. 123).

Studies have shown that even with specific guidelines from teachers, students tend to find their own ways to use provided tools and services. In a study of using blogs for elementary Spanish, Jiménez-Caicedo et al. (2014) found that students had a mixed reception to their use:

They made their own choices regarding how to use and appropriate this sociocultural tool for negotiating meaning and for improving their command of Spanish. Thus, students exerted their individual agency based on their own attitudes, beliefs, and motivations when completing the language learning tasks proposed for the blog project. An interesting finding was the discovery that students chose to align with, resist, or ignore the initial expected outcomes that would result from the implementation of a blog project and web 2.0 technologies in the curriculum (p. 107).

In some cases, students may find the use of familiar online tools and services unacceptable in the context of formal language learning instruction. The following is the experience Reinhardt, Warner, and Lange (2014) recount in relation to incorporating a two-week gaming unit in a 5th semester German class:

Writing about a fun activity, like digital gaming, in a foreign language is a challenging task, and for some students, doing so negatively impacted the actual gaming experience. For this reason, the gaming unit was—at least for some students—both too educational (and consequently, not enough fun) and not educational enough because the object was perceived as nonserious and distinct from the other forms of less vernacular, “higher” cultural production (primarily literary texts and films) which constituted most of the remainder of the curriculum (p. 170).

In situations such as this, the teacher may need to explain explicitly to students (with examples) how familiar online activities can provide language learning benefits. Providing such guidance can be helpful in leading students to become empowered language learners, who possess the skills and knowledge to continue language study beyond the classroom and through activities of personal interest to them. It also helps equip them for the eventuality of learning other languages in the future, along with the tools and resources that are likely to be helpful in that endeavor. Given the goal of helping students to be life-long language learners, it would be useful for students to gain some knowledge of the nature and potential of commercial language learning software such as [Rosetta Stone](#) or online services such as [LiveMocha](#). Many of these products and services offer free trials. Trying out and reporting back on one or more of these products can be a useful individual or partner project for students. In addition to personal experience, teachers can point to studies of such products in recent years (i.e. Nielson, 2011 on Rosetta Stone or Jee & Park, 2009 on LiveMocha).

An approach that is proving to be valuable in making students reflect on the process of language learning is to have them maintain learner diaries or logs. Dam (1995) has shown how useful this can be and how much it contributes to making students autonomous language learners. Another option is to have students maintain portfolios of their language learning experiences, including appropriate artifacts, such as sample writing, academic achievements, digital projects, self-evaluations, annotated links, and so forth. Such portfolios also provide students with the opportunity to include out-of-school language learning

experiences. The [European Language Portfolio](#) has been shown to be an effective example of this kind. There is also the option for students to create their own personal web site, including acquiring their own Internet domain name. Doing so provides a potentially long-term platform for documenting and sharing learning experiences as well as representing a significant step forward in becoming digitally literate. In the discussion around digital literacy, the need to move "beyond mere technical skills and abilities" (Hafner, 2013, p. 830) is sometimes mentioned. I agree that this should not be the end goal for students—digital engagement through social, linguistic, and cultural competencies is paramount—but there is something to be said for the benefits of being technically literate enough to be able to maintain a web site of one's own. A [project at Mary Washington University](#) encourages and enables students to do so through a domain of their own.

A portfolio or a personal web site can also document evidence of intercultural learning—a specific goal of the [Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters](#). Intercultural communication competence is something that can emerge from student activities in collaborative online spaces. However, it is not something that happens automatically. In fact, studies have shown that differences in communication styles in telecollaborative experiences can lead to misunderstandings and even enforcement of existing stereotypes (Hanna & de Nooy, 2009; Kern, 2014; Chun, 2015) Teacher intervention and reflective journals can make a difference.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

As new online tools and services become available, new opportunities emerge for language and culture interactivity, with concomitant possibilities for learning and growth. At the same time, the trends outlined by the New London Group (1996) continue today. One is the continuing blurring of lines between reading and writing, something which Allen (2003) labels "wreading". The kind of interactive reading implied by this term characterizes the experience of hypertext systems such as the web, as well as the reality of the multitasking typically occurring when reading online. Blyth (2014) points out that in online reading there is also a blurring "between private interpretation and public discussion" (p. 201). He discusses the practice of "digital social reading" in which readers share comments and annotations, highlighting the use of the collaborative service [eComma](#) for enabling that functionality. There are a number of web services which provide similar functionality including [Goodreads](#), [Ponder](#), and [LibraryThing](#). If reading can no longer be viewed as static, the same is true of watching video. HTML 5 allows toggling of subtitles and transcriptions on-the-fly (Godwin-Jones, 2014a). Online videos can now also include interactive elements, such as asking viewers to respond to questions embedded directly in the video, a technique widely used in MOOCs.

The New London Group (1996) called for a new "pedagogy of multiliteracies" to account for the emergence of new genres and new ways of experiencing texts and media. This is echoed in Kern's (2014) call for a "relational pedagogy", in order to develop among students "a disposition for paying critical attention to relations among forms, contexts, meanings, and ideologies" (p. 353):

It [a relational pedagogy] focuses attention on subtle interactions between medium, genre, register, and culture so that students can be prevented from jumping to facile conclusions about the way others think, feel, or express themselves that are based on surface language forms alone. It thus exposes students to a much broader scope of inquiry than something like electronic literacy. It connects students to past as well as present practices, giving them perspectives that will prepare them not only to engage critically with today's media but also to help shape the language and literacy practices that will develop with new technologies of the future. (p. 353).

A relational view stresses the importance of context. To fully understand and interact with online texts, it's important to have information such as the target audience, the purpose in writing the text, and the

nature of the language used (and why one and not another style or register was used). This is the kind of "symbolic competence" advocated by Kramersch (2011). It also involves, in looking at texts, a consideration of time frames, the social and political positioning of the text creator, and an awareness of the variety of texts, discourses, and resources on which the creator drew (intertextuality). Bloomaert (2008) points to the importance of recognizing how texts are rooted culturally:

[Literacy practices] gain complexity as soon as we move these issues into the field of globalization, when literacy products – texts and documents – move from one society into another in an ever-intensifying flow. What is correct in one society becomes an error in another society; what is perfectly appropriate writing in one place becomes a meaningless sign in another. Texts may travel easily, but the system of use, value and function in which they were produced usually does not travel with them (p. 6)

Kramersch (2011) points out how global communication and global markets have created the illusion of sameness and equality in interacting with products and texts—we see the same brands and logos across the globe. But what they mean, as Bloomaert points out, can be radically different, depending on the local context.

It seems to me that the critical awareness and cultural sensitivity advocated here needs to be supplemented by an awareness of ethical issues raised in the collaborative online environment. Remix and mashup capabilities, for example, raise not only questions of cultural authenticity, but also of ethical responsibility. Peters and Frankoff (2014) point out that copyright issues are rarely taught and that students are instructed not to plagiarize, but often not helped in how to avoid plagiarism. Many students are likely to be unaware of conventions and best practices for attribution and crediting of online materials, including, for example, the meaning and use of [Creative Commons](#) licenses. Such issues play a role not only in copy and paste, but also in other common online practices. [YouTube](#), for example, has become a frequently used resource in education, but the proliferation of ads (in this and other online services) makes viewing frustrating, to a degree that it borders on being useable. Is it ethical for teachers to discuss the availability of ad blockers, or to point to the many tools for downloading YouTube videos, even though that violates the terms of use? These are examples among many others, and it seems likely that the situation will become more complex in the future.

While mores, attitudes, and regulations affecting the use of online resources are a moving target, the same holds true for online tools and services, which will inevitably continue to evolve. New products are sure to emerge, bringing new capabilities and conventions of use, requiring re-tooled literacies. At the same time, the popularity of specific forms of online communication and social communities will inexorably wax and wane. Just as email has lost favor with the younger generation in recent years, the same seems to be [occurring today with Facebook](#). At the same time, printed books appear to be [on the rebound](#). Recent [critics](#) of online reading and the experience of reading on devices such as Amazon's Kindle have pointed to some of the disadvantages of that medium, including the unavailability of serendipity and the discouragement of deep reading. Similarly, the quality of contributions to online collaborative spaces has been subject to some scrutiny as well. Kurek and Hauck (2014) point to the fact that many of the contributions to social networking sites can be categorized as "social grooming", with writing that is shallow and inconsequential. In fact, the critical scrutiny we expect from our students we should use ourselves in considering the utility of online spaces for language learning. The potential is enormous, but learning gains are by no means automatic, or necessarily substantial enough in many cases to qualify as meaningful.

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