



Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

# DIGITAL LITERACIES FOR ENGAGEMENT IN EMERGING ONLINE CULTURES

Steve Wheeler

.....  
Plymouth University  
United Kingdom  
S.Wheeler@plymouth.ac.uk

## Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures

### ABSTRACT

We are living in a period of technological advancement that is both unprecedented and widely disruptive. Rapid transitions from the previous ages of centralised traditional publication and broadcast media to the present day digital participatory media has been surprising for many especially those working in education. Many things have changed, including the design of computer interfaces, the processing speed and portability of devices, the accessibility of information and knowledge,

our methods of communication, the maintenance of our relationships, commerce, the protection of personal privacy, creative processes, publication of content, and the emergence of new digital tribes and virtual clans. In schools, colleges and universities, change is being promoted that is profound and wide reaching. This paper discusses these changes and exposes some of the issues, challenges and opportunities we now need to meet as professional educators.

### KEYWORDS

digital literacies, disruptive technology, social networking, transliteracy, online learning



Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

## INTRODUCTION

We are witnessing a period of technological development that is both unprecedented and widely disruptive. The rapid transition from an age of centralised traditional publication and broadcast media to the present day digital participatory media has taken many by surprise. The social web has spawned a dynamic and emergent spectrum of virtual cultures, social mores and online practices. In the short time since the Internet has existed, much has changed, including the design of computer interfaces, the processing speed and portability of devices, the accessibility of information and knowledge, our methods of communication, the maintenance of our relationships, commerce, the protection of personal privacy, creative processes, publication of content, and the emergence of new digital tribes and virtual clans (Wheeler, 2009). The music, movie, broadcasting and publishing industries have all suffered significant revenue losses (Lessig, 2005) as a result of the significant shift from 'atoms to bits' predicted nearly two decades earlier by Negroponte (1995). Even the long established dominance of the telephone company is being eroded by web services such as Skype (Godin, 2008). Most significantly, the digital age has been responsible for a disruption of the traditional learning paradigm, ensuring that the self-help 'learning webs' theorised by Illich (1970) have become a reality. Moreover, the open democracy unleashed by new social media has fomented an erosion of the oppressive pedagogical practices redolent of traditional education (Freire, 1993). Living and learning in a digital age brings many opportunities but also many challenges.

## DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY

The argument I wish to pursue here is that new media and digital technologies offer new opportunities for learning yet the disruptive

nature of these tools and the seismic changes they bring require us to conceive an entirely new set of literacies. We are not solely concerned with skills or competencies, but by a far deeper form of cultural engagement, and hence I use the term 'literacies'. I am not simply expressing my own views. This paper also reflects the views of many other commentators including Lea & Jones (2011), Beetham *et al* (2009), and Lankshear & Knobel (2006) who acknowledge that the exponential changes that are occurring require new responses. Essentially, the skills and competencies that have dominated higher education are now considered by many to be inadequate in the face of the rapid proliferation of social networking services, mobile technologies and pervasive computing, but should be transformative (Beetham *et al*, 2009). Our comfortable practices are being disrupted by new technologies, and it is expedient that the teaching profession responds positively to this disruption by developing and mastering new ways to cope with the changes and challenges to which it is exposed.

Several recently published articles, both in conventional paper based mode and online, have explored the notion of 'digital literacy', and as expected, there are diverse views. Anderson (2010) for example, defines digital literacies as the ability to exploit the potential of computer technologies. Literacies, in all their forms, are at once cultural, social and personal (Kress, 2009) and enable us to interact fully in specific cultures. Some warn that without an adequate level of literacy, digital media have the capacity to disadvantage some (van Dijk, 2005), whilst others warn of the nature of the web to undermine knowledge and competency (Carr, 2008; Keen, 2007). However, the overwhelming majority of commentators eulogise over the potential of the social web to liberate education, and democratise learning, with the caveat that digital literacies are practiced.

Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

I use the term 'digital literacy' here not to describe skills, but rather as an alignment to the argument that as we engage with our own specific culture we acquire and develop much more than skills. If I am illiterate (in the sense of reading and writing), I cannot read the signs or engage with text and therefore I am not able to fully participate within my culture. If I fail to apprehend the meaning of something because of that illiteracy, I won't know what I don't know. Further, literacy allows us to develop a critical self-awareness of not only the symbolic nature of our world but also the processes of personal learning (or meta-cognition) and in so doing we build what Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) termed 'cultural capital'.

When I learnt to drive in England, I learnt a set of skills and competencies that were culturally specific, and complied with the written and unwritten rules of driving on the left hand side of the road in the United Kingdom. Transferring those skills to driving in France or the USA was at first problematic, because the formal rules for motorists (and in the case of France, also the language) were unfamiliar territory and the unwritten rules were particularly difficult to assimilate.

Similarly, the informal rules of online communication - sometimes referred to as 'netiquette' - can be alien to those first entering the world of the internet, but with habituated use, are eventually assimilated as literacies.

In this paper I will offer a brief exposition of nine of the key digital literacies I have identified from my own extensive engagement with, and immersion within, online culture. This is not an exhaustive list, it is yet to be fully defined, and given the previously published work, there may be significant overlap with those identified by others. But for me, the list below constitutes a road map which I have already used to enable me to develop themes and topics within the modules I teach to help

students to maximise their learning potential using new and emerging technologies.

- Social networking
- Transliteracy
- Maintaining Privacy
- Managing Identity
- Creating content
- Organising and sharing content
- Reusing/repurposing content
- Filtering and selecting content
- Self broadcasting

## SOCIAL NETWORKING

For those engaged in online culture, one of the cardinal digital literacies is the ability to effectively exploit social networking services. Why is this so important? Surely we are all very familiar with social networks? Most of us have a Facebook account, or maybe a LinkedIn account. Many use Twitter, and some of those out on the periphery may still be using Myspace or Bebo. But what are the essential components of social networking as a digital literacy?

Firstly, I believe we need to network more smartly, particularly in a manner that helps us to learn more effectively in both formal and informal contexts. Jonathan Rose (2010) offered some interesting views about how social networking helps his off-line (for this read 'real life') world. In his blogpost *What's so social about social media?* Rose outlined three functions - supplementing, sifting and sustaining - all of which have a social dimension. In Rose's view, sifting can help to combat the media atomisation that has occurred due to the proliferation of hundreds of satellite and cable TV channels. Once we could all sit down for coffee and talk about what we had watched on TV the previous night. It is less likely that we would be able to do this today, with so many channel options on offer. Watching TV is no longer a distributed



Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

communal activity, nor is much of modern life. What we can do however, with the aid of social media, is to find out what our commonalities are and who is within our community of practice, through filtering tools (such as hashtags) on Twitter and other timeline tools.

Social networking can also help us to find content we need, when we need it. Social bookmarking tools such as Delicious and Diigo enable us to drill down to excavate deeper knowledge through our social connections. Karen Stephenson (2004) believes we 'store our knowledge in our friends'. She describes an emerging distributed intelligence which is not limited by how much we can store and retrieve from our own personal memories. Today, it's not what we know, but who we know that is more important. We now live in an increasingly connected world where we have ubiquitous access to friends and colleagues. Selecting the right tools that will enable each of us to connect into and exploit the collective intelligence of the most relevant communities of practice is one of the new digital literacies professionals and students will need to draw upon.

Finally, social networking skills will require each user to be adept at connecting with new friends and fellow community members. But how will we know whom to connect with and whom to ignore? It's not as if we are in a large room at a party, deciding who looks or sounds like the most interesting person to make a bee-line for. No, it is infinitely more complex and information rich than that. We now have the ability to tap into vast amounts of information about the bewildering number of people we daily encounter on social media platforms. We can see by their avatar and username (sometimes) what kind of person they are and whether it would be interesting to connect with them. Profiles and follow/follower information are also useful sources of detail about a person's interests and background. What they tweet, post or share

gives us advance information about whether we would find connecting with someone useful. So the ability to use social networking effectively is a key literacy for the scholar to acquire right now. If used appropriately, social media can provide rich social and intellectual rewards. Those who fail to network effectively may struggle to succeed in a pressurised world.

## TRANSLITERACY

Transliteracy can be defined as being literate across a variety of different platforms. In essence, it is the ability to be able to create, organise and share content, and communicate across, and through, a variety of social media, discussion groups, mobile devices and other services that are commonly available. This assumes that we communicate differently depending on the tool we use. When I give a face to face presentation, it is qualitatively different (for me and my audience) to a remote presentation I give through Elluminate or Adobe Connect. The experience is not all that changes - we also tend to behave differently, and 'manage our impression' in a different way online. The way we represent ourselves (using avatars, user names) varies for many depending on what medium we are using. I represent myself differently in Second Life to the way I represent myself on Facebook, because each environment has specific affordances that prompt different responses from me. In LinkedIn, I manage a professional version of my online persona, which evaporates when I'm on Facebook. On Twitter I am a bit of a mixture. Sometimes I like to have a bit of fun, and at other times, I'm deadly serious. I have already indicated that each tool has its own particular set of affordances which enable or constrain particular ways of using it. In many ways, however, although these tools are different, they all have a common purpose. Thomas *et al* (2007) state this very well:

Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series, 5, 14-25.*

*“From early signing and orality through handwriting, print, TV and film to networked digital media, the concept of transliteracy calls for a change of perspective away from the battles over print versus digital, and a move instead towards a unifying ecology not just of media, but of all literacies relevant to reading, writing, interaction and culture, both past and present. It is, we hope, an opportunity to cross some very obstructive divides.”*

So for Thomas *et al*, the argument over whether media are different - for example whether digital will replace paper - is spurious. It's more important for us to recognise the significance of each tool, and how each can be used effectively in all its variations, and also in combination with other tools. Ultimately, transliteracy should be about seamlessly using whatever media and communication tools that are at our disposal, and also being able to discern which tools will be the most effective and appropriate in any given context. Do we learn better watching a YouTube video or reading a text? Are we better at presenting our ideas in pictures or as a podcast? I know my answer to that, and it may be different to your answer - which underlines the fact that we all learn differently.

Students today use a variety of tools to create and share content, and it is vital that they are able to do so in a seamless manner. It is important that students spend more time thinking about what they are learning and less time thinking about how to navigate around a website, or how to save a file. This is one reason why many students are more at ease using an external wiki than they are using an institutional Learning Management System. It is also the reason they choose to use Facebook rather than the institutional e-mail system when they want to send each other messages. But students do use all of these tools, and the secret to success is to ensure that they are comfortable with each, and have the requisite

literacies to exploit each tool to its optimum value. This is the reason transliteracy is gaining increasing import as a digital literacy. It will assume even more significance, as more of us become our own broadcasters, publishers and directors.

## MAINTAINING PRIVACY

Another important digital literacy is the management and protection of online privacy, something strongly emphasised by Buckingham (2006). This is aligned to e-safety, which focuses on the protection of people online. Indeed, each of us is vulnerable because there is a huge potential for our privacy to be breached in any online environment. I am certain you would be very angry if someone came snooping around your house and rifled through your personal belongings. And yet many of us can be careless about the way we handle our personal data when we go online. And the extent to which many of us are now electronically connected to others is astounding.

This raises a question: Are any of us really able to protect our privacy on the web? Social media seem increasingly pervasive, and many millions of people post up details of their private lives every day. These include contact details, personal photographs and dates of birth, details they would never dream of giving to a stranger. If they did, it would be considered bizarre and hazardous behaviour. And yet people do exactly that every day online. I am amazed at the dubious photos some students post up onto their social network sites. I wonder if they will still be comfortable with those photographs in a few years, when they apply for a job, and their potential employer performs a Google search to find more information.

It is all a matter of personal choice which personal details you make available on the web.



Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series, 5, 14-25.*

Your privacy settings may help you to protect your personal information, but even if you know how to choose the correct settings (and many students don't) how can you be really certain that your content is fully protected from prying eyes? Posting up your home address and telephone number, and then adding to your timeline that you are going on holiday next week, might be asking for trouble. How can you be certain who has access to your timeline? How do you know how many people read your Twitter feed or your Facebook updates?

You also leave a data trail behind you wherever you go on the Internet. Google and other search engines maintain a record of all the sites you visit during your time online. Many sites send cookies to your computer when you enter them. Some of these can be malicious, allowing other people to gain access to your computer memory, and if spyware has been used, to also record your keystrokes when you pay for something on Amazon using your credit card. Although it's still quite rare for this to happen, this kind of criminal activity is on the increase, and without appropriate Internet Security software, you run the risk of being one of the victims. Have you thought about the amount of personal detail you hold about yourself and your friends on your mobile phone? If you use public wifi networks or open your mobile to Bluetooth connectivity, you may also be opening up the entire content of your mobile for intruders to capture and use. A recent report from the BBC Click team revealed that although malware for mobile phones is on the increase, simple user naivety is still responsible for the majority of privacy problems.

For me, raising the awareness of students and other web users to the dangers of the Internet will always include the problem of maintaining privacy. The golden rules are: Be careful what sites you visit (your security software should alert you to any unsafe sites), be careful what you post up online that may have personal

information in it (this is just common sense) and watch your back - protect your identity, because you never know who may be looking over your shoulder.

## MANAGING DIGITAL IDENTITIES

If all the world is a stage, I demand better lighting! I also want someone to prompt me when I forget my lines. Some better costumes would be nice. Oh, and more exotic scenery? And while we're at it, how about a better script - one that more accurately reflects my true feelings....

William Shakespeare wrote the immortal lines 'All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts'. The lines, appearing in the play 'As You Like It', were his acknowledgement that not only is life transitory, but that each of us performs several roles throughout our lives. Shakespeare also implies that each of us has an audience of some kind. I infer from this that I also play some roles reluctantly, possibly because I am constrained to act in ways that may not accurately represent the real 'me'. But what is the real 'me'? Perhaps one's true identity is dependent upon a variety of factors including context, emotional state and health status. Possibly it changes depending on relationships with the people who are in close proximity while acting out that particular role.

Social anthropologist Erving Goffman (1959) tried to address these questions when he proposed his 'dramaturgy' model - his interpretation of the 'presentation of self in everyday life'. For Goffman, human behaviour was very much dependent on time, space and audience. By audience, he meant those who observe the actor, or with whom s/he interacts. In essence, Goffman argued that we each present ourselves to others in a

Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

carefully managed version that complies with the cultural values, norms, and expectations that are commonly held by actor and audience. Notice how a comedian, stage actor or pop singer manipulates his audience and you will observe how much they desire to be liked, accepted and focused upon. According to Goffman, the way each person represent themselves to others involves some kind of role playing (self-representation) that can involve scripts (speech patterns), props and costumes, just as an actor does during a public stage performance. Such management of impression is common to all humans and is used to form connections and gain influence with others, and also occurs in online performance of the self (Miller & Arnold, 2009).

The rapid emergence of digital media and the phenomenal growth in popularity of self broadcasting and publishing through social media, asks some new questions about how people represent themselves in virtual spaces. Sherry Turkle was one of the first researchers to conduct detailed studies into 'Life on Screen' by observing behaviour in multiple user domains (MUDs). Published in 1995, when the Web was still embryonic, Turkle showed how people employ multiple identities in virtual worlds, and that in some case these become as real to them as their identity in 'real life'. Her studies led Turkle to propose that new forms of personal identity are emerging as a result of prolonged interaction with others through technology - that our identities are increasingly multiple and decentred.

There is further evidence to suggest that people portray themselves differently depending on the social media platform they use - and through text and other media (Wheeler & Keegan, 2009). This may mean the same person using different avatars (images or animated characters used to represent real objects), usernames and forms of interaction, to suit the different norms and social

expectations of the communities that frequent those various environments. In the context of my initial metaphor, some social media have better 'lighting' and 'scenery' than others. The audiences change, some are friendlier than others. But how much does the actor change, and to what extent do they manage their impressions to suit the expectations of their audiences? And how much should each of us pay attention to the way we manage our online impression - our digital identity?

## CREATING CONTENT

One of the most important digital literacies students require today is the ability to create appropriate, subject specific content. Content creation is an important feature in many personal learning environment (PLE) models, and together with organising and sharing, makes up the cardinal triumvirate of skills that provides learners with a clear advantage. If you subscribe to constructivist theories of learning, you will understand why the creation of content is important in any context. We learn by doing, and we more actively engage with learning when we create artefacts that can be shared within social contexts such as communities of practice. Artefacts are a material outworking of knowledge creation, and according to Vygotsky (1978), they can be aids to solving problems that could not be solved as effectively in their absence. In turn, such artefacts can also influence the individuals who use them to draw attention to previously unknown activities and ways of conceptualising the world around us. When I write a blog post for example, I am creating new content as I write, and then in turn, that content may reveal to me something I may have missed if I had not written the post. The blog content allows me perhaps to view a problem from a different perspective. In essence, writing a blog enables me to know what I am thinking, in a concrete, persistent and searchable form.



Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

Clearly, blogging is only one way to create and publish content online. The use of wikis in group learning to promote collaboration and make a record of what has been learnt is becoming more popular in all sectors of education. Podcasts, normally in the form of the audio recording of an event, are also a means of projecting and sharing content to others so that they can listen at a time and in a place (usually on the move) of their choosing.

Sharing of other forms of content such as images and videos can be easily achieved with the use of photo and video sharing services such as Flickr and YouTube. I often share my slideshows through Slideshare, and receive feedback and other data on their subsequent uses. However, for any of the above formats of user generated content to be fully usable, it first needs to be located. Without organisation and tagging (the use of key descriptive words) such content is not searchable. In my next blog post in this series on digital literacies, I will explore this facet of the social web in more detail.

## ORGANISING CONTENT

The very act of creating content, whether it is a video, blogpost or podcast, is often with the intention that it will be shared in some way, usually on the web. Now we have the social web, there are more ways than ever to make your content available to a vast audience. But how do you share in such a way that makes it visible to the web? The answer is that you organise it by 'tagging' it. You think of key words that best describe your content, and then insert them into the appropriate box within the tool you are using.

Tagging content is something of an art. Choosing the correct descriptive words to tag your content, can sometimes be a little uncertain and is often subjective. But tag you must, if you want your content to be

discoverable. Tagging will also make finding content within a large stack of bookmarks a lot easier. You can search for content in 'bundles' - this is useful if you only want to see the links in your list related to 'podcast' or 'audio', for example. Some tagging tools also offer tag clouds - clouds of labels that have larger or smaller font size depending on the amount of times they appear in your bookmark list.

But we can go further using tagging, so that content becomes a community artefact around which groups can discuss, interact and collaborate. Using a web service such as Delicious for example, will allow you not only to make your content more visible to those who are searching using key words, but it will also reveal to you (and to the other users) exactly who else may be interested in the same, or similar content. This is more than just bookmarking. It's social bookmarking - organising your content, and the content of others, into sets that are more useful and more socially coherent. The number at the start of each hyperlink displayed in my own Delicious account indicates how many other people have bookmarked the same link. If you click on that link, it will display them. Click on any user and you will see what other links that user has bookmarked. Some of these may have slipped past you, but you can now see them and also visit those sites and then bookmark them if you think they might be useful to you. You can also hold conversations with those others around you about the sites you find interesting, and perhaps learn even more about your mutual interests. This is the power of social bookmarking - just one of the many ways you can organise and share your content on the social web.

## REPURPOSING CONTENT

The ability to repurpose, remix or otherwise reuse existing content is one of the key



Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

features of the social web. Why reinvent the wheel? If content is already available on the web, the logical choice would be to see if it can be reused, or even adapted or altered to suit your own needs.

Currently there is a trend for scholars, teachers and academics to make their content available for download and many are allowing others to repurpose or alter this content. Most of my recent slide presentations are freely available on this Slideshare site, and I publish them under a Creative Commons (CC) license that allows others to download and use them either as complete slideshows, or to select individual slides that can be inserted into their own slideshows. I also allow derivatives - that is, you can take the images or texts, or even the design themes of my slides, and repurpose them for your own use without cost. Some have used my slides for their own presentations or workshops (with full acknowledgement to me of course). Probably one of the most pleasing results for me has been when people have translated my slides into other languages.

The ethos of the social web is that we share and share alike - why hoard knowledge or ideas if they can be of benefit to others? Knowledge is like love - you can give it away, but you still get to keep it. The only barrier to sharing and repurposing of content is copyright. The web is changing rapidly, but for many, copyright laws remain archaic and arcane.

Although these outmoded, unwanted and ultimately despised copyright laws apply to internet content just like they do to books or music CDs, there are also some welcome signs of change in the digital domain. Copyleft and Creative Commons are just two of the initiatives that have emerged in recent years. Creative Commons will enable you to share your own content whilst protecting your own intellectual rights, and also simplify how you can use, repurpose and remix other people's content too.

The 'mashup' - using sounds, videos, images, text or any combination of these - to make entirely new creative content, appeals to many. It can be time consuming, but also very rewarding. So, the next time you find some really useful content on the web, look out for a licence agreement somewhere on the page to see if you are allowed to re-use it.

## FILTERING AND SELECTING CONTENT

When there is live TV coverage of an event do you watch the entire broadcast or just the highlights? The answer of course will depend on a number of factors, including how interested you are in the event, and how much time you have available to you. It's exactly the same with content on the web. Recently I wrote about the 'tsunami of content' online that threatens to swamp us all. Just about everyone using the web today is creating content on a daily basis. How do we find the gold dust content amidst all the dross and trivia that exists on the internet?

Search engines have their place, and of course, we tend to use them a lot. Some of the more intelligent search engines are morphing into answer engines, computing your question against highly structured data (see for example Wolfram Alpha), and providing focused information. Often, for busy professionals, even this is not enough. Then there is problem of how to organise your content when you actually find it. Many are using tools such as Delicious.com or Diigo.com to tag, store and share their favourite content. These tools are also excellent and well used, but are they enough to cope with the vast quantity of content we want to keep? Wouldn't it be nice to have up to date, regular content, all presented in one place?

Enter the digital curation tools. There is a special breed of web users out there that we call 'the curators.' In a sense, curators are



Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

a little like their counterparts in museums, because they tend to trade in very specialised, focused content. As a part of the great collective, curators choose a topic they are interested in, and then search and display dynamic content related to this topic, using one or more digital curation tools. They are collectors of the virtual and ephemeral and they have some great tools.

Scoop.it is a very useful and attractive curation tool, enabling summaries and snapshots of related content from blogs, media sharing sites and other social media to be displayed, usually in two columns.

Storify is another style of curation tool, enabling the curator to search for specific content from social media sites that can be sequenced into a blog style story. The curator can add their own text, and embed the final product into their blog.

A third curation tool is Pearltrees, which works as a kind of connective network of content, which can be shared, repurposed and linked in a number of ways across social media platforms. The Pearltrees Teams group function also enables users to collaborate to create shared curated collections of content.

All three tools allow conversations and further sharing, and all three are very attractive as a means of making sense of the vast amount of content there is on the web. There are of course many other tools being developed that can also perform similar tasks of consolidating and accumulating content, and offering it in a digest form to busy professionals. The great collective it seems, are becoming the great collectors.

## SELF-BROADCASTING

The term 'self-broadcasting' would seem on the face of it to be somewhat narcissistic.

But we need to be aware that the social web has shifted the balance of power away from commercial production companies in favour of the individual. The shift is from push to pull. This is a characteristic of the Web 2.0 and Edupunk movements - the do it yourself culture in which costly proprietary systems and tools are spurned in favour of haphazard, unbranded, informal mashups and loose aggregations of tools. There is a huge array of social web tools to choose from and many of them are free at the point of delivery. Furthermore, it is a participatory ecosystem. Where Web 1.0 was all about downloads, Web 2.0 is about uploads too. Web 2.0 tools have made it possible for a massive, unprecedented surge in self-publication and personal broadcasting. The usage statistics of video sharing service YouTube should convince even the strongest sceptic that people really want to share their content. As I write this paper, YouTube is boasting over 3 billion views within each 24 hour period and receives 72 hours of uploaded video each minute (RTE News, 2012). Also, the photo-sharing service Flickr is claiming that in 2011, between 4.5 million images are uploaded every day, and hosts well in excess of 6 billion photographs and other media such as short video clips (Royal Pingdom, 2012). The blogging sentinel service Technorati lists 1.2 Billion blogs currently active (Technorati, 2011). These are phenomenal statistics. People everywhere are using the web to broadcast, publish and share their ideas, opinions and creative works to the rest of the world. It may not all be great content, but here and there, you will find gems if you search for them. This is not narcissistic - it is natural and progressive engagement within the online participatory media culture.

The music industry has had to learn the hard way that it no longer has the monopoly on music production and distribution. It now co-exists alongside independent companies and individuals, all of whom are just as intent on selling - or in some cases, giving their music

Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

away for free - to the public. Many teachers and students are doing the same thing, with educational content. Traditional publishers are having to sit up and take notice - particularly to the open access movement. Public awareness has been raised about the openness and availability of educational content. When students encounter a pay wall, they will simply go elsewhere to discover the same or similar content.

Podcasting, and its visual equivalent, vidcasting, are very quick methods of publishing your ideas online for others to discover. Blogging your ideas over a period of time attracts a readership, and if you are lucky, and produce consistent quality and quantity of posts, you will garner a loyal following of readers who will return again and again. The bonus will be if they also comment on your posts. For many bloggers, this is the only spur they need to persist. But beware, for the social web can also be the not-so-social-web. Peer review is very informal, and can be anonymous. Either way, it can also be harsh and even abusive, so bloggers, broadcasters and publishers need to be resilient. This kind of digital literacy enables

learners and teachers to fully engage in the social web culture, and all its rewards. Every time they post or upload new content, authors and producers makes a mark on the web and the reach of their digital footprint extends.

## CONCLUSION

The digital age is changing our lives irrevocably, and has the capability to sustain its disruption. To be a student in this century is to be a lifelong learner. Learning through digital media can be fraught with difficulty, and demands a new spectrum of literacies for successful outcomes. The ability to manage one's online presence, creating, organising, repurposing and sharing content, managing online identity and protecting personal data are all important, but perhaps transliteracy is one of the most important, as it represents the ability to be equally adept across a variety of platforms. The benefits of engaging with social media can far outweigh the limitations and dangers, if the appropriate literacies are practiced.

---

## References

- Anderson, J. (2010) *ICT Transforming Education: A Regional Guide*. Bangkok: UNESCO Publication.
- Beetham, H., Littlejohn, A. & McGill, L. (2009) *Thriving in the Twenty-First Century: Report of the Learning Literacies in a Digital Age project (JISC)*. Available online at: <http://www.academy.gcal.ac.uk/llida/LLiDAReportJune2009.pdf> (accessed 21 May, 2012)
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.-C. (1970) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture, 2nd Edition*. London: Sage.
- Buckingham, D. (2006) Defining Digital Literacy: What do Young People need to know about Digital Media? *Digital Kompetanse*, 1 (4), 263-276.
- Carr, N. (2008) Is Google Making us Stupid? *The Atlantic*, July/August Issue Retrieved May 21, 2012, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/6868/#>
- Freire, P. (1993) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.
- Godin, S. (2008) *Tribes: We need you to lead us*. London: Paitkus.
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.



Steve Wheeler (2012). Digital literacies for engagement in emerging online cultures. *eLC Research Paper Series*, 5, 14-25.

- Illich, I. (1970) *Deschooling Society*. London: Penguin.
- Keen, A. (2007) *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing our Culture and Assaulting our Economy*. London: Nicholas Brealey.
- Kress, G. (2009) *Literacy in the New Media Age*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Lankshear, C. & Knobel, M. (2006) *New Literacies: Everyday Practices and Classroom Learning*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Lea, M. R. & Jones, S. (2011) Digital Literacies in Higher Education: Exploring Textual and Technological Practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(4), pp. 377-393.
- Lessig, L. (2005) *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity*. London: Penguin.
- Miller, H. & Arnold, J. (2009) Identity in Cyberspace, in S. Wheeler (Ed.) *Connected Minds, Emerging Cultures: Cybercultures in Online Learning*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Negroponte, N. (1995) *Being Digital*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Rose, J. (2010) *How Social is Social Media?* Retrieved May 21, 2012, from <http://jonathanrose.wordpress.com/2010/05/28/how-social-is-social-media/>
- Royal Pingdom (2012) Internet 2011 in numbers. Retrieved May 24, 2012, from <http://royal.pingdom.com/2012/01/17/internet-2011-in-numbers/>
- RTE News (2012) 72 hours of video uploaded to YouTube every minute. Available online at: <http://www.rte.ie/news/2012/0522/youtube-turns-seven.html>
- Stephenson, K. (2004) (Internal Communication, no. 36) *What Knowledge Tears Apart, Networks Make Whole*. Retrieved May 21, 2012, from <http://www.netform.com/html/icf.pdf>
- Technorati (2011) State of the Blogosphere. Available online at: <http://technorati.com> (accessed 24 May, 2012).
- Thomas, S., Joseph, C., Lacetti, J., Mason, B., Mills, S., Perril, S. & Pullinger, K. (2007) Transliteracy: Crossing Divides. *First Monday*, 12 (12), 3 December 2007.
- Turkle, S. (1995) *Life on Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, New York: Touchstone.
- Van Dijk, J. (2005). *The Deepening Divide. Inequality in the Information Society*. London: Sage Publications.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, London: Harvard University Press.
- Wheeler, S. (2009, Ed) *Connected Minds, Emerging Cultures: Cybercultures in Online Learning*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Wheeler, S. & Keegan, H. (2009) Imagined Worlds, Emerging Cultures, in S. Wheeler (Ed.) *Connected Minds, Emerging Cultures: Cybercultures in Online Learning*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
-