Foreword

I began writing this Foreword on my way back from an international lecture. I was surrounded by people talking on their cell phones, listening to music, doing email, texting, playing games, surfing the Web, typing on their computers and net books, and the list goes on. The age levels of the people varied, but one thing was clear. “Reality” was being highly mediated. New technologies were everywhere. This is occurring in homes, places of paid and unpaid labor, schools, the sites of popular culture, and nearly every public and private space—at least for those who can afford or have access to these technologies. Indeed, what now counts as public and private is often being redefined, a fact brought home to me when in the airport and then in the plane people seemed to think nothing of having phone conversations about their most private thoughts and actions that were overheard by anyone who was sitting within hearing distance.

Often subtly but sometimes radically, these technologies are changing our workplaces, our schools, our actions, our time commitments, and often our very identities since such technologies can also create new forms of sociality and collectivity (Apple 2006). All of this raises crucial issues about educational priorities, about the connections between education and a changing economy, and about the connections between educational policies and practices and the daily lives of teachers and students. This book demonstrates that new media can challenge our accepted understandings of teaching, learning, literacies, what counts as “legitimate knowledge” and who has it, and so much more.

*Interactive Media Use and Youth* also documents that context counts and it counts in important ways. Context counts in terms of the socio-economic distribution of skills and knowledge. It also is important in terms of what structures and resources are available and how these resources will be used, and by whom. All of these elements are important for our understanding of the place of new media in institutions and in people’s lives.

There can be no doubt that new technologies and new media offer new possibilities. But let us be honest. They also can be the site for the reproduction of relations of dominance and subordination and for the production of new hierarchies and inequalities. Just as importantly, they can also provide crucial spaces for actions and meanings that contest dominant forms and hierarchies. These contradictory tendencies can occur at one and the same time. Thus, our focus needs to be unromantic. There are positives and negatives, possibilities and limits. And all of this is occurring in educational and other institutions that are already structured in particular ways.

Even given the possible contradictory processes, uses, and outcomes of these new media, they do offer exceptional ways of rethinking our actions as educators. Let me give an example. In *Official Knowledge* (Apple, 2000), I describe some of my experiences as a film-maker working with a group of young women. This was no “ordinary” group of youth. They were incarcerated in a juvenile detention center, placed there for such things as drug use and small scale drug selling, prostitution, violence in
schools, and similar kinds of things. These were 13-17 year old “girls” who were tough, hardened by abuse, by alienating educational experiences, and by impoverishment. And yet they were fragile on the inside. They were in essence part of society’s throwaway populations.

Working with them on a joint film-making project had powerful effects on me and on the young women involved. Their emerging sense of competence, their ability to see themselves collectively as meaning makers and as creative, when they had constantly been told that they were basically unworthy and that they had little or no future, provided a space for alternate understandings of who they were and who they could be. This convinced me that media—when connected to the lives and creative capacities of youth—has the capacity to illuminate the ways in which popular cultural forms and content connect one with processes of cultural production that are powerful meaning-making acts. And it also provided ways in which these young women could create new forms of expression and new identities that were radically different than those that society had made available to them.

There is a powerful tradition within cultural studies that seeks to make us aware of these possibilities. For example, Paul Willis (Willis, 1990) has argued that popular cultural forms and technologies—even those that are simply mass produced as commodities for a lucrative youth market—are often taken up in what can best be described as aesthetic and self-making forms. Thus, the aesthetics, politics, and realities of consumption cannot be reduced to the economics of production without doing damage to the creative possibilities inherent on new technologies and cultural forms. A similar case has been made by DuGay and his colleagues in their discussion of the genesis, sale, and multiple uses of such things as the SONY Walkman (DuGay, et al. (1997). Each of these analyses in grounded in the insights of figures such as Richard Johnson (1986) who argues that any cultural commodity, technology, and cultural form needs to consider what he calls the circuit of cultural production, a circuit that has 3 moments: production, circulation, and reception. All three need to be taken up seriously, especially when we are interested as the book you are reading is, in the intricate connections between new media and the ways they can provide insights into the world of education, new knowledge, youth culture, and altered social relations (see also Dyson 1996; 2007).

Readers of Interactive Media Use and Youth would do well to pay close attention to what this fine book tells us about this circuit and about the ways in which new media operate on and in the lives of youth. The chapters in this book provide important insights into the complicated realities and possibilities of media and their connections with and uses by youth inside and outside the sphere of formal education.

Michael W. Apple
John Bascom Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies
University of Wisconsin - Madison, USA

REFERENCES


