Chapter 4

Digital Citizens as Writers: New Literacies and New Responsibilities

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ABSTRACT
As much of life is spent in digital spaces, information literacy now includes a personal responsibility for digital citizenship. This chapter focuses on how students can best become literate, successful learners in the age of MOOCs by embracing a personal responsibility for information literacy. The need for information literacy embedded into MOOCs is imperative because literacy, particularly writing, has rapidly changed in global digital participatory culture and continues to evolve. The shift from traditional classrooms filled with primarily print materials toward mobile devices and instant access to information in real time has revolutionized literacy within a historically short time period. The idea of good writers being also good readers may still hold true in new media formats; however, the concept of the student as a “prosumer” (both consumer and producer of content) in an age of disposable social media and constant connectivity requires a new vision of writing and literacy.

INTRODUCTION
Information literacy (IL) is a personal responsibility that has become crucial for both academic success and life in networked culture. Because most individuals of all ages from toddlers to the elderly have instant access to information on mobile devices, reading and writing have taken new forms and the term literacy has many facets including digital literacy, media literacy, transliteracy and metaliteracy. Just as young people learn good manners and how to be responsible citizens in society within our physical world and communities, they also need to understand the good manners and responsibilities needed within the virtual world where much of life is now spent in virtual communities. This concept of digital citizenship is part of information literacy and the American Library Association believes, “Although we live in the “information age” and children seem “connected” from birth, research has shown that people need education in developing skills that will help them use the Internet effectively” (ALA, 2015).

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This move from primarily print resources to digital environments coincides with the rise of constructivist learning in education (Yilmaz, 2008). Students now live in a connected society with multiple modes of interactivity from social media and virtual worlds to (soon to arrive) virtual reality (Lewis, 2015). These various forms of networked connectivity certainly played a part in the rise of the Massive Open Online Course or MOOC. This chapter focuses on the responsibilities of digital citizenship for writers as prosumers (both consumers and producers) of information in 21st century learning. Within that context, literacy (particularly writing) has been revolutionized by global digital participatory culture and the need for a clear definition of information literacy is important.

Learning to write has taken on new meaning as the tools for writing merge physical, virtual and augmented spaces. Certainly, opportunities to utilize communication tools have expanded; but, so too, the responsibilities for using those tools wisely have become substantial. Even the youngest learners have become prosumers in global digital participatory culture with mobile apps that allow creativity through mixed media. As new platforms for learning, such as MOOCs, expand and provide opportunities for global connectivity, the need for information literacy in multimodal formats becomes essential.

BACKGROUND

Defining Information Literacy

There are several definitions of information literacy (IL), all centered on the idea of gathering and using information as a literate individual. For example, The Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) information literacy model defines IL stating, “Information literate people will demonstrate an awareness of how they gather, use, manage, synthesize and create information and data in an ethical manner and will have the information skills to do so effectively” (SCONUL, 2011). All university libraries and national libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland are represented in SCONUL. The circular nature of information literacy is presented in this model of 7 pillars as learners move throughout the process of gathering, evaluating or synthesizing information.

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association, believes “Information literacy has progressed from the simple definition of using reference resources to find information. Multiple literacies, including digital, visual, textual, and technological, have now joined information literacy as crucial skills for this century” (ALA, 2007). Understanding that learning is a social endeavor, AASL standards include skills, responsibilities, dispositions in action and self-assessment strategies. Dispositions refers to the affective or emotional elements motivating learners toward best practices. This emphasis on personal responsibility at an early age corresponds with the concept of digital citizenship in networked culture. Just as good manners, etiquette, and lawful conduct in the physical world create civilized communities, digital citizenship means using technology in safe and ethical ways to create civilized virtual communities.

The American Library Association ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) Standards defines IL as “a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (ALA, 2000). ACRL is currently undergoing a revision of the standards to address metaliteracy and transliteracy.

Metaliteracy (meta meaning “about”, “beyond”, or “after”) is an all-encompassing term that includes emerging technologies with emphasis on producing and sharing in participatory culture. Mackey and
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