Chapter 8
Learning Content Creation in the Field: Reflections on Multimedia Literacy in Global Context

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ABSTRACT

Media literacy is the raison d’être of journalism and media education in universities. With the advent of digital technologies and generational online developments such as Web 2.0, media literacy has now turned into multimedia literacy, where future media professionals learn to write, produce video and audio, edit, link, curate, and disseminate the content produced as individual communicators rather than members of a production team where each member specializes in one or two of these aspects to media production. Simultaneously there has been an increase in efforts to globalize educational experiences for students. These developments raise questions about new elements to media literacy, pedagogy, assessment, and learning the ethics of responsible communication about foreign cultures in the media. This chapter tackles these questions by reflecting on a Study Abroad course experience where students in a US university traveled to South India, and created content in the field about specific experiences related to development.

INTRODUCTION

Media literacy is the raison d’être of journalism and media education in universities. With the advent of digital technologies and generational online developments such as the oft-cited Web 2.0, media literacy has now turned into multimedia literacy. What was until recently exclusively a writing, photo, or video approach to information has transformed from a production team combining these skills into an individual enterprise, with the student having to learn to write, produce video and audio, edit, link, curate, disseminate, and monitor the content produced by her (Carpenter, 2009; Goh & Kale, 2015; Madison, 2014; Sabrina, 2016). This new, multidimensional role for the individual journalist or media profes-
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sional raises some questions from the point of view of media literacy education. What are some new developments in media literacy in this context? How and where do we locate the literacy elements in the pedagogy? How can the content, or output, be assessed (see, for example, Smith, 2017 on assessment rubrics)? If the learning situation occurs outside the home country, how does context become a part of the literacy exercise? These broad questions guide this chapter, and a Study Abroad course experience with multimedia storytelling serves as a case for reflecting upon them. Students in a US university traveled to South India for this course, and created content in the field about specific experiences related to development. The students used local resources for producing multimedia outputs and completed the writing segment of the content also on-site.

Many literacy variables converge in this experience – learning to gather information from linguistically and culturally diverse groups such as tribal populations and farmers, learning media production, and learning to produce information with fewer resources such as erratic and uneven connectivity, to list a few. The goals for the course were to present first-hand accounts of developing communities and the choices they have to make that conveys the dilemmas of emerging economies. This path to media literacy includes a number of learning experiences such as appreciation of unfamiliar cultures and production of information about them that is accessible online to interested audiences, the excitement of discovery and the ethics of responsibly disseminating the information discovered, learning to use multimedia technologies in foreign systems, and learning to compile the expression of this literacy into sense-making packages for print and online audiences.

This chapter is a reflection on the Study Abroad course experience for acquiring multimedia competence in the field, in an emerging economy. Since reflection occurs after the fact, the framework that follows articulates concepts that might not have fully or consciously informed the experience for both the students and the instructor at the time of offering the course. The goals are to offer a framework and points for consideration primarily for Study Abroad instructors of media literacy and education, and to reflect on some lessons learned. Where pertinent, some elements may be useful for coordinators of Study Abroad programs, both in the home and host institutions.

A framework for conceptualizing the Study Abroad multimedia literacy course follows. The framework draws from a few different areas that are important for this reflection – the global citizen, the field, multimedia literacy, and content creation. This is a new course in the institution, offered for the first time for Study Abroad, and a first for both the instructor and the students. Reflections on the decisions taken at each juncture – materials, student composition, assignments, and evaluations are presented following the conceptual framework. Using the conceptual framework as a backdrop, the course details and lessons learned are discussed. E-mail exchanges and notes taken during the process and in the field provided the data. In the final section of the chapter, reflections on lessons learned and some points for consideration in developing such a media literacy course are offered.

CONTEXT AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Four conceptual threads intersect to provide a framework within which to understand this multimedia literacy Study Abroad course. First, the idea of the global citizen underpins international education, and this concept is central to Study Abroad courses in general, stimulating more extended and deeper awareness of peoples, cultures, and geographies beyond students’ immediate and familiar surroundings within the national context. Secondly, the field or the venue outside the country where the course is